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# QUARTERLY UPDATE ON CONFLICT AND DIPLOMACY

16 FEBRUARY–15 MAY 2008

COMPILED BY MICHELE K. ESPOSITO

*The Quarterly Update is a summary of bilateral, multilateral, regional, and international events affecting the Palestinians and the future of the peace process.*

## THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

The beginning of the quarter, which marked 3 months since the relaunch of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at the Annapolis conference in 11/07 (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147), was a critical period for making progress on final-status talks to meet a 12/08 target date for reaching a comprehensive accord. Although numerous meetings were held between 2/16 and 5/15, continuing deterioration of conditions in the Palestinian territories, particularly Gaza, negated what little of substance had been achieved.

By the close of last quarter, Israel had taken no serious steps toward fulfilling road map pledges reiterated at Annapolis to ease restrictions on Palestinian movement that divided the West Bank into 3 cantons or to freeze settlement construction in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Though the Palestinian Authority (PA) was making halting progress toward expanding its security control of the West Bank, Israel demanded that its army (the Israel Defense Forces; IDF) maintain overriding authority and freedom of action, meaning that IDF arrest raids, house searches, and curfews continued unabated, as did Israel's ongoing construction of the separation wall. Meanwhile, Israel maintained its crippling siege of Gaza, imposed after Hamas's ouster of Fatah in 6/07 and tightened in late 10/07. After Hamas members breached the Rafah border on 1/23/08 in an effort to relieve the growing economic strain and the border was resealed on 2/3, the total siege was reinstated, with Israel banning all exports from Gaza and allowing only enough humanitarian imports (food, fuel, medicine, etc.) to preclude humanitarian catastrophe. After the Annapolis conference ended on 11/27, Israel had also started dramatically increasing the frequency and severity of its military operations, particu-

larly targeting Gaza (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147), leaving at least 204 Palestinians dead and 500 wounded by the close of last quarter on 2/15/08. As of 2/16, at least 5,608 Palestinians (including 49 Israeli Arabs and 17 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators), 1,042 Israelis (including 323 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 212 settlers, 507 civilians), and 61 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers) had been killed since the start of the al-Aqsa intifada on 9/28/00.

### *A New Format for Talks*

By 2/16, Israeli PM Ehud Olmert and PA Pres. Mahmud Abbas, in keeping with their Annapolis pledges, had begun meeting every 2 weeks, and negotiating teams led by Israeli PM Tzipi Livni and the PA's Ahmad Qurai' were meeting several times a week behind closed doors to discuss core issues (e.g., Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements), although the Palestinian side complained that no progress was being made and accused Israel of not being serious about negotiations. Indeed, as last quarter closed, Israeli Vice PM Haim Ramon stated (2/11) publicly that Israel had no plans to achieve a detailed peace agreement with the Palestinians by the end of 2008 and aimed only to reach a "declaration of principles" that would lead to a Palestinian state "after 2008—2 to 3 years after," while the Israeli government announced (2/12) approval for construction of more than 1,000 new Jewish settlement housing units to consolidate its hold on Jerusalem. In frustration, PA PM Salam al-Fayyad, on a visit to Washington, warned (2/11, 2/12) the Bush administration that unless Palestinians saw serious, tangible progress on the ground immediately, the Annapolis process was guaranteed to fail.

On 2/19, Abbas and Olmert held another biweekly meeting to assess progress on the status of final-status negotiations, with each

accusing the other of deliberately stalling and undermining the prospects of reaching an agreement by the end of the year. The leaders did agree, however, that their decision at Annapolis not to discuss details of ongoing final-status talks publicly, while necessary to maximize the chances of success, had a negative effect on Israeli and Palestinian public morale, either raising frustrations at the lack of accomplishments or feeding fears that concessions were being made behind the scenes. Accordingly, Abbas agreed (2/19) to a suggestion by FM Livni to expand talks to include issues that could be discussed openly, which ideally would attract media attention and “create a feeling of momentum in the negotiations.” Some 10 new committees, to be overseen by Livni and Qurai’, were then created to discuss such issues. These included developing a “culture of peace” (i.e., halting Palestinian incitement, in keeping with the road map), “state-to-state issues” (e.g., exchanging ambassadors, allowing Palestinian membership in international organizations), “internal security” (i.e., Israeli-Palestinian security coordination), “civil security” (i.e., permits to enter Israel, Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on border crossings), economic issues (e.g., customs duties, tax collection, free trade zones between Israel and a future Palestinian state), judicial issues, water, and the environment. The arrangement seemed largely to be an effort to demonstrate some sort of movement in the talks before U.S. Secy. of State Condoleezza Rice returned to the region on 3/4–5 to check the progress of negotiations. Although the new committees reportedly began meeting on 2/24, any progress there may have been went unreported as the broader Annapolis process deteriorated.

### ***Operation Hot Winter***

Meanwhile, near-daily IDF incursions into Gaza continued (see Chronology for details), while Palestinian rocket fire damaged a home in Sederot on 2/17, causing no casualties. In response to the strike, Olmert gave (2/17) the IDF a “free hand” to operate against militias in Gaza, warning that Gazans would “not be allowed to live normal lives” as long as Israelis were targeted by rocket fire. The following week saw no decrease either in IDF operations in Gaza or in Palestinian rocket fire. On 2/25, a Palestinian rocket seriously injured a 10-year-old Israeli boy in Sederot. The IDF responded on 2/27 with an air strike on Khan Yunis, assassinating 5 Hamas members and wounding

the alleged head of Hamas’s rocket program. In response, Hamas fired (2/27) 25 rockets into Israel, killing 1 Israeli (the first by rocket fire in 9 months, and the 14th since Palestinians began to use rockets in 2001) and wounding 2. The IDF immediately launched (2/27) air and artillery strikes across Gaza, including a symbolic strike on the PA’s vacant and partially collapsed Interior Min. in Gaza City, killing 1 Islamic Jihad member and 4 Palestinian civilians (including children ages 6 months, 12, 13) and wounding at least 37 Palestinians. Meanwhile, on the sidelines of a conference in Japan, Olmert conferred (2/27) with U.S. Secy. of State Rice regarding the rocket attacks. Asked by the media if she urged restraint, Rice replied, “I think that’s not a good way to address this issue. The issue is that the attacks—rocket attacks—need to stop.”

The next day (2/28), Israel launched **Operation Hot Winter** (also called Operation Warm Winter) targeting Gaza’s “terrorist infrastructure,” making more than 20 air strikes, mostly in northern and central Gaza, that killed 20 Palestinians (predominantly militants but also 2 adult civilians and 5 children, including 4 boys aged 8–14 playing soccer in Jabaliya town) and wounded more than 50 (including at least 14 children, 5 women). Palestinians responded with 31 rockets and 15 mortars into Israel, wounding 2 civilians. The Israeli FM in. warned (2/28) that continued Palestinian rocket fire “may leave us no choice” but to launch a massive, prolonged ground incursion into Gaza. Abbas countered (2/28) that “armed struggle . . . could become an option for the Palestinian people” if Israeli heavy attacks continued. Nonetheless, he allowed the negotiations with Israel to go forward, authorizing Qurai’ to proceed with a round of final-status talks (2/28) with Livni in Jerusalem. Heavy exchanges of fire across the border continued on 2/29, leaving at least 4 Palestinians dead (3 of them civilians), more than 50 Palestinians wounded, and 1 Israeli civilian lightly injured by rocket fire. Israeli Dep. DM Matan Vilnai warned (2/28) that Palestinians risked bringing a “bigger *Sboab*” upon themselves if they continued to fire rockets; his use of the Hebrew word for “catastrophe,” typically reserved for the Nazi Holocaust, was much commented upon. Egypt (which had been mediating unproductive cease-fire talks between Israel and Hamas since the 1/08 border breach) and the EU stepped up (2/29) diplomatic efforts to broker a Gaza cease-fire.

During the night of 2/29–3/1, Israel launched the largest ground incursion into Gaza since the 2005 disengagement, sending large numbers of ground troops into the Jabaliya area, Bayt Hanun, and Gaza City. As Palestinians across the Strip hunkered down in their homes, IDF troops supported by tanks, helicopters, and warplanes conducted house-to-house searches for weapons in the Jabaliya area, clashing with local armed Palestinians, occupying homes as staging areas, directing tank fire at residential and commercial buildings, rounding up 10s of Palestinians for questioning, and bulldozing electricity and telephone cables. The IDF also continued intensive air strikes across Gaza, destroying a mosque frequented by Hamas security forces, the Gaza City home of an Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades commander (he survived, but 6 of his family members were killed), numerous suspected weapons stores, and several police stations. At least 62 Palestinians (29 civilians, including at least 15 children, 7 women; 25 militants; 8 Hamas-affiliated police officers) were killed and 175 wounded (including 44 children, 6 women, 1 paramedic) on 2/29, marking the deadliest day since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000; 2 IDF soldiers were also killed and 7 injured in the heavy fighting, some by roadside bombs planted by Palestinian resistance groups in anticipation of an incursion. Palestinians fired approx. 24 rockets into Israel, lightly wounding 6 Israelis (including 1 woman and 2 children).

Under heavy pressure from the Palestinian factions to take a stand, Abbas requested late on 3/1 that the UN Security Council (UNSC) convene an emergency session to discuss Israel's incursion and, on the morning of 3/2, suspended peace talks with Israel. Israel instantly denounced (3/2, 3/3) Abbas for violating the Annapolis understandings by going back on pledges "to continue the discussions at the same time that we continue our war on terrorism." On 3/2, the UNSC and EU issued separate statements calling for an immediate halt to all acts of violence, with the EU calling Operation Hot Winter a "disproportionate use of force" and "collective punishment." Olmert retorted (3/2) that "nobody has the right to preach morality to the State of Israel for taking basic actions to defend itself." Meanwhile, the U.S. refused to condemn the Israeli operation, stating (3/1) that "there is a clear distinction between terrorist rocket attacks that target civilians and actions in self-defense."

Large-scale Israeli operations in Gaza continued through 3/2, leaving another 21 Palestinians dead and 4 IDF soldiers wounded. Palestinian rocket fire continued, causing no damage or injuries. Toward midnight on 3/2, the IDF withdrew ground troops from the Jabaliya area and the remaining ground forces early on 3/3. The 5-day operation left at least 111 Palestinians (half of them civilians, including at least 24 children; Hamas reportedly lost 37 members; Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees [PRCs] said they together lost 15) and 3 Israelis (1 civilian inside Israel, 2 IDF soldiers in Gaza) dead, and nearly 400 Palestinians injured (most of them civilians). In addition, 21 Palestinian homes were completely destroyed (leaving 147 Gazans homeless) and 88 heavily damaged (affecting 616 Gazans), 90 dunams (d.; 4 d. = 1 acre) of agricultural land were bulldozed, and 80 Palestinians were detained for questioning (at least 5 were remanded to Israel). Even after the ground operations ended, the IDF continued (3/3) air strikes on Gaza (killing 3 Palestinians and destroying the Palestinian Council headquarters in Gaza City), while Palestinians replied with rocket fire (causing damage but no injuries). Olmert warned that Israel was merely pausing operations in advance of Rice's 3/4–5 visit, stating: "What happened in recent days was not a one-off event. . . . We are in the midst of a combat action."

Of note: Israeli DM Ehud Barak apparently sent messages to Western diplomats on 2/29 to inform them in advance of the ground incursion but to state that it would not be the massive and prolonged offensive threatened on 2/27 (see above). As such, some analysts (see *New York Times* 3/6) believed the Jabaliya incursion was a test run to practice how to take over a heavily populated, Hamas-controlled area and to get a sense of how much and what kind of resistance the IDF would meet if it did attempt to retake Gaza. (Palestinians on the ground in Jabaliya reported [*New York Times* 3/4] that Hamas fought far more professionally than previously, posing a serious challenge to the IDF.) In the days following Operation Hot Winter, Barak and Vilnai met (ca. 3/4) with Israeli atty. gen. Menachem Mazuz and senior legal advisers from the Justice Min. and the IDF advocate general's office to discuss the legality of several scenarios to halt Gaza rocket fire, including (a) cutting all fuel supplies to Gaza; (b) declaring as "combat zones" wide areas from which rockets are fired, evacuating civilians from these areas,

and then “clearing” (presumably bulldozing) them; and (c) shelling or bombing areas in retaliation for rocket fire after warning the civilians to leave. The legal experts stated that precedent dictated that responses to rocket fire must be based on “proportionality and precision.” (For more on the Olmert administration’s view of proportionality, see Doc. C2 in the Documents and Sources section.) Barak asked the experts to prepare a formal legal opinion on a “gradual evacuation of the population” in Gaza from areas of fighting. (This had not occurred by the end of the quarter.) Israeli officials also held (ca. 3/4) closed-door meetings with UN aid officials, asking them how long it would take them to set up “humanitarian corridors” from Egypt’s al-Arish port to Gaza should Israel launch a sustained ground operation that would force the IDF to seal all entries into the Strip, even to humanitarian aid. An anonymous UN official confirmed (3/4) that, while Israel had not asked aid agencies to take specific actions, “There are indicators that Israel is assessing whether aid agencies are prepared for such an eventuality.” On 3/5, Olmert convened his security cabinet, which agreed to take “continuous and systematic” action to halt Palestinian rocket fire and weaken Hamas, and to continue diplomatic and information campaigns directed at the international community aimed at maintaining “the legitimacy of, and freedom of action in, continuing to strike at Hamas.” At a heated Knesset session the same day, MK Effie Eitam (National Union) railed against Arab MKs and Israeli Palestinians generally for their criticism of Operation Hot Winter, vowing that “one day we will expel you from this house, and from the national home of the Jewish people. . . . We have to drive you out.” Ignored completely in this process was a 2/26 *Ha’Aretz*/Tel Aviv University opinion poll showing that 64% of Israelis favored direct talks and a cease-fire with Hamas, which Hamas had repeatedly offered and Israel rejected since 6/07; only 28% opposed them. (Broken down by political party, 55% of Kadima voters and 72% of Labor voters would support direct talks.)

Meanwhile, Israel’s siege of Gaza continued to take its toll. By 3/3, 80% of Gazans were dependent on food aid, 95% of Gaza industries had ceased operations because of bans on imports, and unemployment (for those seeking work) stood at 40%. The UN reported (2/29) that the severe Israeli import restrictions had created hoarders and black markets, pushing up retail prices further, ag-

gravating shortages, and increasingly forcing families to buy on credit. Palestinians across Gaza were experiencing electricity cuts of 8–10 hours/day because of Israeli fuel restrictions (except in Rafah, which received electricity from Egypt). Gazans were advised (from 2/27) to boil their water to prevent disease; waterworks still receiving electricity had run out of chlorine to treat sewage due to a ban on chlorine imports since 1/21. On 3/5, 8 British-based human rights groups, including Amnesty International, reported (3/5) that humanitarian conditions in Gaza were the worst they had been since the occupation began in 1967. In the West Bank, the UN reported (3/5) that from the Annapolis summit to 2/29, the IDF had erected more West Bank barriers to Palestinian travel than it had taken down (536 barriers in 11/07 compared to 580 on 2/29). On 2/27, the IDF staged an ambush in Nablus, assassinating a member of the Fatah-affiliated al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AMB) and wounding 2 others, all of whom had been among the 178 senior AMB members granted amnesty by Israel in 7/07 as part of a deal to keep West Bank AMB gunmen off the street. On 3/3, the eve of Rice’s visit, the comprehensive death toll stood at 5,762 Palestinians and 1,045 Israelis, and Palestinian confidence in the Annapolis process was at a low.

#### ***U.S. Demands Talks Continue While Israel Acts at Will***

En route to the region on 3/3, Rice tried to strike a balance in her comments on the Gaza situation, seeking to acknowledge Arab anger over Operation Hot Winter and the ongoing siege without constraining Israel’s freedom to act. She placed ultimate blame on Hamas for attempting to undermine the Annapolis talks, while stating that Israel should ensure that humanitarian convoys could reach Gazans (cf. Israeli talks with UN aid agencies above) and avoid attacks that might harm civilians. Reporters traveling with her (e.g., *New York Times*, *Washington Post* 3/4) stated that she seemed to “take pains” not to call explicitly for a cease-fire, because the Bush administration believed that a negotiated cease-fire would enhance Hamas’s legitimacy and tighten its hold on Gaza (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147). Asked to endorse Egyptian and EU efforts to broker a cease-fire (see above), she stated only that the initiatives had “some merit.”

Rice stopped (3/4) first in Cairo to consult with Egyptian pres. Hosni Mubarak, who urged the U.S. to press for a mutual

cease-fire in Gaza and to persuade Israel not to use excessive force. She then headed to Ramallah, where she pressed (3/4) Abbas to resume negotiations with Israel quickly on the grounds that suspending talks was “a victory for those who don’t want to see a two-state solution.” Abbas reiterated firm support for the Annapolis process but was noncommittal about resuming talks, stressing that a main pillar of the Annapolis process was improving the situation on the ground for Palestinians. (Media reports almost all portrayed Abbas as taking pride in standing up to pressure from Rice.) Rice then dined (3/4) privately with Olmert. On 3/5, Rice spent the day shuttling between Israeli and Palestinian officials, exerting extreme pressure on Abbas to agree to resume talks. Ultimately, Abbas backed down, stating (3/5) that he would resume talks, but he did not say when. In exchange, Rice agreed to send Dep. Secy. of State David Welch to Cairo to discuss the Egyptian-EU cease-fire proposal (presumably to find a way to secure an informal cease-fire that would not enhance Hamas’s legitimacy) and to convene the first session of the joint U.S.-Israeli-PA committee agreed to at Annapolis to assess and encourage road map implementation, including a halt to settlement construction. (The committee chair, U.S. Lt. Gen. William Fraser, had recently visited the region and given his first confidential report to Rice, but a trilateral meeting to follow up on his recommendations had not yet been held; see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147 for background.) Privately, Rice encouraged Olmert to make a public statement that Israel would halt attacks on Gaza if Hamas stopped rocket fire into Israel, but Olmert refused that Israel should make the first move. (Of note: During Rice’s visit, Israel sent [3/5] troops to the unauthorized settlement outpost of Esh Kodesh e. of Ramallah to disconnect a water pipe, highlighting the move as evidence that it was taking steps against outposts as pledged to the U.S. Within hours, settlers reconnected the pipe and restored water service.)

The priority after Rice’s 3/5 departure was to achieve calm in Gaza, a task made more urgent by a Palestinian suicide attack on 3/6 at Jerusalem’s Mercaz Harav, Israel’s leading Zionist yeshiva and the ideological home of the far-right religious settler movement. (A lone Palestinian gunman, later identified as a bus driver for the school and an East Jerusalem resident unaffiliated with any faction, entered the campus library and opened

fire, killing 8 students and wounding 9 before being shot dead by Israeli police and an off-duty IDF soldier.) To preclude massive retaliation by Israel (which often hits Hamas/Gaza in retaliation for attacks carried out by other groups/elsewhere), Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulayman stepped up urgent talks with Hamas and Islamic Jihad reps. in al-Arish, convincing them (3/6) to suspend rocket fire unilaterally and observe calm as of 3/7 while he worked to obtain a more formal bilateral arrangement with Israel. Heavy cross-border exchanges that had continued through 3/6 dropped off immediately. Though Israel continued bulldozing operations inside the Gaza border and firing on Palestinians who strayed near the border fence and on Palestinian fishing vessels to keep them close to shore, it refrained from air strikes and deep ground incursions as of 3/7 (see Chronology for details). Over the next several days, Hamas pressed hard for a cease-fire deal to include the West Bank as well as Gaza (a possibility that reportedly worried Abbas, since the PA was not party to these talks and a cease-fire in the West Bank secured by Hamas would undoubtedly improve its standing there at PA expense), but Israel would not agree. At the same time, Rice, as promised, dispatched Welch to the region (ca. 3/7) for talks with Sulayman and Israeli and Palestinian officials on the cease-fire as well as to address Israeli concerns about Rafah border security and “ways . . . to support the return of the Gaza Strip to the control of the Palestinian Authority”; no details were released. With the unilateral Palestinian cease-fire seeming to hold, senior Israeli DMin. official Amos Gilad met with Sulayman in Egypt on 3/9. The next day, Olmert stated publicly (3/10) that if Palestinian rocket fire resumed, “we will shoot. If it will not, we will have no reason to shoot.”

On 3/12, Hamas’s Ismail Haniyeh, head of the de facto government in Gaza, publicly offered Israel a formal cease-fire proposing the lifting of the siege of Gaza and halting Israeli “assassinations, killings, and raids” in the West Bank and Gaza in exchange for a halt to all Palestinian armed resistance. The Israeli government did not reply officially, but hours later the IDF ambushed and assassinated Islamic Jihad’s Bethlehem commander Muhammad Shihada, senior AMB member Ahmad Balbul, and 2 other Islamic Jihad members, one of them an elected municipal council member. (Fatah spokesman Hasan ‘Abid Rabbuh stated on 3/12 that the 4 men had not taken part in violence in

years and had demonstrated “a clear commitment to the Authority’s decision to maintain calm”; all 4 had asked to be included in Israel’s 7/07 amnesty deal with the AMB, but Israel had refused. Abbas praised them as martyrs.) About the same time, the IDF also made an arrest raid in the village of Sa’ida targeting Islamic Jihad’s Tulkarm commander Salih Karour, wounding him in an exchange of fire and then shooting him in the head execution-style. Islamic Jihad members in Gaza, habitually less inclined to agree to a cease-fire, immediately resumed (3/12) rocket fire into Israel, causing damage but no injuries. The IDF resumed air strikes and cross-border raids on Gaza on 3/13, ending less than a week of relative calm.

Meanwhile, Israel announced significant new settlement construction plans to tighten its hold over Jerusalem. Three plans were approved on 3/9: construction of 1,100 new housing units in Pisgat Ze’ev and Givat Ze’ev settlements just north of Jerusalem; a new settlement neighborhood of 400 housing units in the Nabi Yaqub section of East Jerusalem; and a deal between the Israeli DMin. and Jewish settler leaders for the removal of several unauthorized settlement outposts in exchange for 100 housing units to be built in Ariel (near Salfit) and Elkana (near Qalqilya) settlements. Another 2,200 settler housing units in Givat Hamatos in East Jerusalem’s Bayt Safafa neighborhood were given preliminary approval on 3/13. Around the same time, Israel reportedly began issuing deeds to Jews for East Jerusalem real estate belonging to the Islamic Waqf and Palestinian absentees. UN Secy.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon called (3/10) on Israel to suspend the 3/9 plans in the interest of peace, and even the U.S. called (3/10) the plans “unhelpful.” But Israel’s position (stated 3/9) was that “this should come as no surprise to anyone, not to the Americans and not to the Palestinians,” as the construction was “consistent with our long-standing position that [these areas] will stay part of Israel in any final-status agreement.”

As these events unfolded, Rice, to demonstrate to the Palestinians that the U.S. was engaged, sent U.S. envoys Gen. Fraser (road map implementation) and Gen. James Jones (charged with assessing how security should be handled in future agreements) to the region for consultations. Israel’s response was dismissive: FM Livni flatly told (3/9) Jones that as long as Hamas was in control of Gaza, the creation of a Palestinian state was not consistent with Israel’s security needs, while

DM Barak simply did not show up to the first trilateral security meeting with Fraser and PA PM Fayyad on 3/14. (An anonymous Israeli official stated on 3/14 that Barak “did not feel like going to a meeting and getting scolded” for Israel’s settlement expansion plans.) While the PA charged (3/14) that Israel’s reception of the envoys underscored “a lack of seriousness” toward the negotiations, the U.S. made no official comment. Abbas, asked (3/15) by a Palestinian reporter about options if the peace process collapsed as a result of Israeli intransigence and U.S. unwillingness to bring pressure, scolded the reporter for asking such “frustrating, embarrassing, and confusing” questions and refused to answer.

#### ***Fatah-Hamas Talks in Yemen***

In fact, Israeli and U.S. inaction forced Abbas to explore an alternative route: With the negotiations stymied and conditions in the territories deteriorating, support for the PA was in steep decline. A Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research poll conducted in the West Bank and Gaza 3/13–15 showed that Abbas’s 19% lead over Haniyeh in polling in 12/07, just after the Annapolis summit, had almost totally evaporated. Overall support for Hamas was up from 31% to 35%, while support for Fatah was down from 49% to 42%; and Palestinians favoring ending negotiations (75%) and approving of rocket attacks (64%) had reached their highest levels in 15 years of polling. Abbas, who since 6/07 had refused to discuss meeting with Hamas until it ceded control of Gaza to the PA, agreed to Yemeni mediation to broker a Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, hoping to take credit for repairing internal Palestinian splits and achieving a deal on his terms, thereby improving his domestic position. On 3/18, senior Fatah and Hamas officials Azzam al-Ahmad and Musa Abu Marzuq opened face-to-face talks in Yemen and 5 days later signed (3/23) a Yemeni-proposed “framework for the resumption of dialogue between the two movements for the return of the Palestinian situation to what it was before the Gaza incidents” in the presence of Yemeni pres. Ali Abdullah Saleh. The proposal (the full text of which was not released) affirmed “unity of the Palestinian people, territory and authority” and recommended that Hamas return control of Gaza to the PA and that new elections immediately be held. Hamas announced (3/23) that the sides had agreed to begin national unity talks on the basis of these goals in 4/08.

Resumption of Palestinian national unity talks created a situation in which 3 sets of potentially conflicting negotiations were underway simultaneously: the Israeli-Palestinian final-status talks (intended to undermine Hamas by Abbas, Israel, and the U.S.), the Egyptian-mediated cease-fire efforts between Israel and Hamas (viewed as potentially necessary to Israel and the PA, but threatening to both if a deal bolstered Hamas), and Hamas-Fatah reconciliation talks (which might be necessary to preserve Abbas's leadership of the PA but would indisputably legitimize Hamas). Moreover, Israel had initially agreed to engage in the Annapolis process only because Abbas had broken with Hamas, raising the possibility that Israel might suspend final-status talks if earnest national unity talks began as planned. Though the U.S. and Israel did not comment publicly on the Yemeni deal, it was clear they were not pleased.

While the Yemeni talks were ongoing, U.S. VP Dick Cheney as part of a broader regional tour stopped (3/22-24) in Israel and Ramallah to meet with Israeli and Palestinian officials. Ignoring Israel's recent statements, actions, and diplomatic affronts to the U.S. (particularly Barak's decision to ignore the trilateral talks led by U.S. envoy Fraser; see "U.S. Demands Talks Continue" above) that undermined the Annapolis process, Cheney focused his talks with PM Olmert and other Israeli officials on the perceived threat from Iran. Abbas and Fayyad stressed that Israel's inaction on the peace process and escalating military operations had led to a "deterioration in just about every facet" of Palestinian life, including the PA's legitimacy (with Abbas warning that if the environment did not change, his government would be "has-beens for sure"), and urged greater U.S. support for Egyptian cease-fire efforts in particular. Cheney, for his part, stressed the U.S.'s "enduring and unshakable . . . commitment to Israel's right to defend itself always against terrorism, rocket attacks, and other forces dedicated to its destruction" and vowed that "the U.S. will never pressure Israel to take steps that threaten its security." The U.S., he said, was "committed to moving the process forward," but "it is not America's role to dictate the outcome." While the U.S. still supported creation of a Palestinian state, he noted, this goal required PA "determination to defeat those who are committed to violence and who refuse to accept the basic right of [Israel] to exist." He went on to say that "history has clearly shown" that Israel

is prepared to make sacrifices for peace when they have Arab partners "who accept Israel's permanence and are willing and capable of delivering on their commitments." Ending his visit on 3/24, Cheney accused Hamas and its backers Iran and Syria of "doing everything they can to torpedo the peace process."

Publicly, Cheney made no mention of the Yemeni talks during his visit, and there was no evidence that he and Abbas discussed the issue privately. However, the day he left (3/24), Abbas aides began to backpedal furiously on the Yemeni deal, claiming that Fatah's representative Ahmad had been "hasty" and "signed a deal by mistake." PA negotiations adviser Saeb Erakat restated Fatah and Abbas's demand that no progress on national unity could be made until Hamas returned control of Gaza to Abbas. Though the retraction by Fatah leaders may have eased tensions with Israel and the U.S., Abbas was left in a bind: With all three lines of negotiation meant to improve the Palestinian situation on the ground at an impasse, continued deterioration of humanitarian conditions and of Abbas's (and Fatah's) legitimacy seemed inevitable.

### *Rice Tries Again*

Rice returned to the region on 3/29 for her 14th visit since early 2007 to press once again for "real, concrete progress" improving security for Israelis and reducing restrictions on Palestinian movement and access, hoping this would invigorate final-status talks. Shuttling (3/29-31) between Israel (for meetings with Olmert, Livni, and Barak) and Amman (for meetings with Abbas, Fayyad, and Jordan's King Abdallah), Rice secured Abbas's agreement to resume immediately his biweekly meetings with Olmert and to take steps to improve West Bank security. Israel, in exchange, pledged to remove 50 of some 580 barriers to Palestinian movement in the West Bank; to allow the PA to deploy additional security forces in Jenin (they did so on 5/3) and to open police stations in some parts of area B; to facilitate construction of new industrial zones near Bethlehem, Hebron, and Jericho; and to approve permits for 5,000 West Bank Palestinian construction workers to enter Israel (marking a 25% increase in permits to work in Israel; the government approved the new permits on 4/13, citing Israeli demand for additional labor). (These pledges were essentially the same as those secured by Rice in the 11/05 Agreement on Movement and Access [see Doc. A4



in *JPS* 138] at a time when Israel had only 10s of roadblocks across the West Bank; Israel never implemented that accord.) Rice called the agreed steps “a very good start,” while PA negotiation adviser Saeb Erakat said, “We will believe it when we see it.” Israel declared on 4/3 that the 50 West Bank barriers had been removed, but the PA said there was no noticeable impact on freedom of movement as a result and asked the UN for verification. (On 4/11, the UN reported that Israel had removed 61 roadblocks since Rice’s latest visit, only 5 of which were significant. Six had already been reinstated, and the rest were deemed “of minimal or no significance in improving Palestinians’ ability to move around.” Providing detail, the UN stated that 9 removals had “minimal effect,” opening access to a small piece of land to a very limited number of people; 17 had “no significance” either because they were inside a closed military zone or because an alternate route had been available to Palestinians; 13 had been erected immediately before they were removed; and at 11 sites, there was no evidence a barrier ever existed.)

Just before leaving on 3/31, Rice publicly stated that Israeli “settlement activity should stop—expansion should stop,” but Israel made no commitments. To the contrary, hours after her departure, Israel’s Jerusalem Planning Committee announced (3/31) approval of an additional 600 settler housing units in Pisgat Ze’ev (apparently above and beyond those approved on 3/9; see above), and the Shas party announced that it had secured pledges from Olmert to approve 100s of new units in Beitar Ilit settlement near Bethlehem. Olmert’s office confirmed (3/31) this, restating that Israel would continue to build in areas it intends to keep under final status and referring to Bush’s 4/04 letter of assurances to PM Ariel Sharon acknowledging the need to adjust the 1967 borders to encompass “already existing major Israeli population centers” (see Special Doc. B in *JPS* 132). On 4/2, the Israeli Housing Min. presented (4/2) Olmert with a proposal for construction of 1,900 new Jewish settler housing units across the West Bank in 2008: 682 units in Beitar Ilit (likely those mentioned by Shas), 510 units in Givat Ze’ev, 302 units in Ma’ale Adumim e. of Jerusalem, 160 units in Binyamin settlement n. of Jerusalem, 158 units in Efrat near Bethlehem, and 48 units each in Ariel near Salfit and Kiryat Arba in Hebron. (The 48 Ariel units may be included in those agreed by the DMin. on 3/9; see above.)

On 4/7, Abbas and Olmert held their first meeting since 2/19 and agreed that final-status talks would continue henceforth “without interruption”—essentially amounting to a pledge on the PA’s part not to suspend talks again to protest Israel’s military actions, effectively acceding to Israel’s interpretation of the Annapolis accord as guaranteeing that Israel’s need to provide security and “to confront terrorism and incitement” would always take precedence (see preface to the accord in Special Doc. A in *JPS* 147). Abbas demanded significant improvements on the ground, but Olmert stated that while Israel was committed to the road map and hoped to reach a “historic agreement” by the end of the year, it “prefers to leave some of the more complex on-the-ground issues until the end of the process.”

The Livni-Qurai’ teams also resumed frequent meetings shortly after Rice’s departure. Despite “strict secrecy,” a Palestinian source reported (4/10) that Livni and Qurai’ were discussing a U.S. proposal, possibly offered by Rice during her recent visit, for the sides to reach a temporary 5-year agreement by the end of 2008 that would involve allowing the PA to provide limited services to Palestinians in Jerusalem (as it did before the 2000 outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada) and Israeli “assurances” concerning troop withdrawal from the West Bank, water issues, and a release of Palestinian prisoners. Final-status negotiations over Jerusalem and refugees would be postponed during the 5-year interim period. Other reports indicated (e.g., *Washington Post* 5/15) that by this time, Livni and Qurai’ were also trading maps and heatedly debating where permanent borders should fall. The Bush administration reportedly hoped that the sides could make enough progress by Bush’s 5/08 visit to the region to attend Israel’s 60th anniversary celebrations and the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Sharm al-Shaykh to make possible a Bush-Olmert-Abbas meeting in Sharm al-Shaykh to endorse an “interim statement” that would show positive steps toward finalizing an agreement by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, Israel, which had resumed cross-border attacks (including air strikes, bulldozing operations, and a brief ground incursion) on Gaza on 3/13, began to escalate military operations on 3/26, just after Cheney’s departure. The escalation involved major bulldozing operations in al-Qarara (3/26, 4/2), Khuza (3/31), and al-Bureij r.c. (4/4) and arrest raids in Wadi al-Silqa (3/29),

Dayr al-Balah (3/31), and Bayt Hanun (4/1), sparking clashes that killed 9 Palestinians by 4/6 (see Chronology for details). After Rice's visit and the PA's 4/7 pledge not to suspend final-status talks, Israel sharply stepped up operations to "harm the terrorist infrastructure" in Gaza (as stated 4/11), with violent incursions and air strikes targeting Gaza City (4/8, 4/16), Khan Yunis (4/8, 4/11), Khuza (4/10), al-Bureij r.c. (4/11), al-Qarara (4/15), and Wadi al-Silqa (4/15) that left another 14 Palestinians dead, dozens injured, 8 homes demolished, and more than 150 d. of land bulldozed by 4/16; 1 IDF soldier was also killed. In addition, the IDF assassinated Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) military commander Ibrahim Abu Olba in Bayt Lahiya on 4/14, Islamic Jihad's Nussayrat commander Abdallah al-Ghussayn in Jabaliya r.c. on 4/15; and attempted to assassinate the AMB's Gaza City commander on 4/13.

In response to this upsurge in Israeli violence, Palestinian factions in Gaza (the AMB, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the PRCs) began to target IDF bases at the main Gaza crossing points into Israel in an apparent effort to kidnap or kill IDF soldiers, eliciting sharp retaliation. The first such attack took place on 4/9, when 4 armed men representing the AMB, Islamic Jihad, and PRCs attempted to raid the Nahal Oz fuel depot under cover of mortar fire, killing 2 Israeli civilian employees; the IDF immediately killed 2 of the attackers and pursued the 2 others with air strikes and artillery fire, killing 1 gunman and 4 bystanders and wounding another 6 civilians. (Israel cut off fuel imports to Gaza for a week as punishment, resuming the flow of industrial gasoline for Gaza's power plant only on 4/16.) On 4/16, Hamas and Islamic Jihad members staged a diversion near the Nahal Oz crossing to draw IDF troops into Gaza, where they ambushed the soldiers, killing 3. The IDF responded immediately with air strikes on the area, killing 4 Palestinian gunmen, and throughout the day with air and artillery strikes on Palestinian targets, particularly Juhur al-Dik in central Gaza, killing 16 Palestinian civilians and wounding 32 and also bulldozing 6 homes and 200 d. of Juhur al-Dik land. The IDF also assassinated (4/16) 2 Islamic Jihad members in Qabatyat. On 4/19, under cover of fog and mortar fire, 3 Hamas members drove 3 explosive-laden vehicles into the perimeter fence at the IDF-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing, killing only themselves and wounding 13 soldiers (3 moderately, 10 lightly). Israel responded

by stepping up air strikes, killing 13 Palestinians between 4/19 and 4/23, including 3 in targeted assassinations.

In the meantime, the siege was continuing. As of 4/23, Israel was still barring the transfer of commercial fuel for cars and generators. As a result, Gaza's Health Min.'s general storage unit ran out of fuel on 4/22, spoiling 50,000 infant vaccines; the UN estimated it would take 6 months to replenish the supply. The last ambulances ran out of fuel on 4/19. Unable to run treatment facilities or fuel garbage trucks, Gaza municipalities continued to dump raw sewage into the Mediterranean (50 m.-60 m. liters/day since 1/24), while 12 municipalities had stopped all solid waste collection, affecting 500,000 Gazans. As of 4/23, Israel had barred for 11 months the import to Gaza of spare parts donated by Germany for Dayr al-Balah's landfill machinery, which processes waste for 450,000 Gazans. The UN reported (4/17) that up to 280,000 Gazans were receiving water for only 3-5 hrs./day because of fuel shortages to run pumps. Meanwhile, Israel allowed only about 200 trucks/week of emergency aid through Kerem Shalom crossing, carrying such items as baby bottles, meat, fish, and medical equipment—a drop in the bucket for Gaza's population of nearly 1.5 million. In the West Bank, the IDF continued routine arrest raids and house searches and stepped up house demolitions (especially in Hebron and around Jerusalem; see Chronology for details). Between 3/3 and 4/23, Israeli-Palestinian violence had claimed 116 Palestinians (nearly as many as during Operation Hot Winter) and 16 Israelis, bringing the comprehensive toll to 5,880 Palestinians and 1,061 Israelis since September 2000.

#### *Abbas's "Clear Failure"*

By late 4/08, the PA openly complained that no progress was being made in negotiations with Israel, and the Bush administration had reportedly abandoned hope that a trilateral meeting with Abbas and Olmert to unveil a statement of progress would be possible by the WEF meeting, 2 weeks away. With that idea scrapped, Bush made no plans to meet with Abbas during his 5/08 visit, which concerned the PA greatly. Abbas therefore requested and received approval to meet with Bush in Washington on 4/25 during a speaking tour to the U.S.

In their meeting at the White House on 4/25, Bush assured Abbas of his belief that the Palestinians could achieve a statement of

principles on final status with Israel by the end of 2008. However, when Abbas urged the U.S. to declare the 1967 borders as the basis of negotiations on a Palestinian state and to press Israel to follow through on Annopolis pledges to halt settlement construction and ease restrictions on Palestinian movement, Bush (according to PA negotiations adviser Saeb Erakat) did not answer directly, stating that he would not get involved in details and was “focusing on the bigger picture.” The White House issued a statement afterward (4/25) stating that “ultimately, [it] is for the Israelis and the Palestinians to come to an agreement.” The Palestinian delegation viewed this as a U.S. message that the Palestinians should stop hoping for a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To boost Abbas, Bush announced that he would meet with him at the WEF in Sharm al-Shaykh after his visit to Israel. Returning from the U.S. on 4/25, Abbas publicly called his visit to Washington “a clear failure,” acknowledging that Bush had offered him no support and that reaching an agreement with Israel by the end of 2008 would therefore be difficult. “We don’t want a declaration of principles because we had one,” he said, referring to the 1993 Oslo Accord. “Now we want a normal agreement. And then we can go for the details.”

Adding to Palestinian pessimism, Dov Weisglass, the chief of staff to former PM Sharon, stated in an interview (ca. 4/24) that in spring 2005, before Israel’s disengagement from Gaza, Israel and the U.S. made a secret verbal agreement in which Rice reaffirmed that Bush’s 4/04 letter to Sharon gave Israel permission to expand Jewish settlements in the West Bank that it hoped to retain under final status. The details of what would be allowed were fleshed out between Weisglass himself and then dep. national security adviser Elliott Abrams, and then endorsed by Rice and Sharon. Weisglass did not elaborate further. The White House denied (4/24) that there were any such understandings.

On 4/28, as Israel began preparations to move its Jerusalem police headquarters from the predominantly Arab neighborhood of Ras al-Amud to the controversial new E-1 site in occupied East Jerusalem, police officials signed an agreement giving a right-wing Jewish settler group the right to occupy the vacant Ras al-Amud building, which would serve as the nucleus of a new Jewish settlement. (The settlers had already filed plans with Israel’s Jerusalem Planning Committee to construct 110 housing units on the site.)

The same day, Israel’s High Court rejected (4/28) a petition by Palestinians in al-Aqaba village near Tubas seeking repeal of an IDF order to demolish 60% of the village’s homes and confiscate all but 100 d. of the village’s 3,000 d. of land. In rejecting the petition, the High Court supported the IDF’s position that the land was “strategically important” to the military.

Between Abbas’s 4/25 return and Bush’s arrival in Israel on 5/14, the outlook for the peace process became increasingly bleak: Israeli-PA negotiating teams continued to meet without progress. Olmert and Abbas met again on 5/5 but did not narrow differences. On 5/11, Olmert declared to the press that Palestinians “don’t have a right of return, and I don’t think that this is on the agenda as far as Israel is concerned.” Israel also rejected (4/25) another offer from Hamas for a mutual cease-fire covering Gaza only (scaled back from Haniyeh’s 3/12 offer). On 4/30, Egyptian intelligence chief Sulayman secured the agreement of all 12 Gaza factions to observe a mutual cease-fire that would apply first to Gaza (and include a lifting of the siege) and later be extended to the West Bank. Sulayman traveled to Israel on 5/12 to present the offer personally, but Israel rejected it (5/12) on the grounds that it did not include the release of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Under increasing stress, Abbas made an emergency trip to Amman on 5/1 for a heart catheterization procedure, returning to work the next day. And, on 5/2, news broke that the Israeli attorney general had approved a police request compelling Olmert to sit for questioning immediately regarding a new fraud case alleging that he accepted \$100,000s of illegal donations from American philanthropist Morton Talsansky between 1999 and 2002, potentially leading to the collapse of his government and early Israeli elections that would put the peace process on hold and possibly usher in a right-wing Likud government.

Meanwhile, between 4/25 and 5/14, the IDF kept up the pace of its attacks on Gaza, including daylong ground incursions, bulldozing operations, arrest raids, and air and artillery strikes, killing some 26 Palestinians, wounding at least 53, demolishing 10 homes, and leveling more than 800 d. of agricultural land. These attacks included air strikes on Rafah, assassinating Islamic Jihad’s al-Quds Brigade leader, ‘Awad al-Qiq (4/30), another senior al-Quds Brigade commander, Nafiz Mansur (5/1), and a 3d Islamic Jihad member (targeted with Qiq on 4/30, but

who died 5/2). By 4/28, most Gaza bakeries were closed for lack of flour, and there was virtually no cooking gas left in the Strip. On 5/11, Gaza's power plant shut down for lack of fuel. Israel allowed (4/29, 5/5) special shipments of fuel to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to allow it to continue delivery of food assistance to Gazans. Palestinian rocket and mortar fire continued at a moderate level, killing 2 Israelis and wounding 3 on 5/9 and 5/11. Palestinians also fired (5/4) a mortar at Nahal Oz crossing, causing no injuries.

### *Waning Hope for a 2008 Deal*

News of the Talansky affair in particular deepened pessimism that progress toward final status could be made by the end of the year: If Olmert made an important peace move, it would likely be seen as a cynical tactic to save his political career. Increasingly, Israelis and Palestinians seemed to expect that nothing of substance would be achieved until new Israeli and U.S. administrations were in place.

Rice, who attended a donor meeting in London on 5/2 to assess PA budget issues (see Donors section below), made another brief trip to Israel and Ramallah (5/3-5) to assess the negotiations before Bush's visit. Rice expressed disappointment to Olmert over the "qualitative character" of the roadblocks removed since her last visit, stating they were not "as significant as they might have been" (special envoy Fraser had confirmed the UN's 4/11 assessment during a visit to the region in late 4/08), but she did not demand that Israel remove more, apparently so as not to add to the pressures on his government. Instead, she urged him simply to be aware of "the importance of creating an atmosphere . . . conducive to negotiations." Abbas and his chief negotiators pressed Rice again for the U.S. to "take a stand" by stating that 1967 lines should be the basis of discussions on final borders. Rice refused, saying Israel and the Palestinians must decide the issue themselves but should do so quickly, "once and for all," so as to end "the [ongoing] argument over Jewish housing expansion on disputed ground." After spending the day on 5/4 shuttling between Olmert, Barak, Fayyad, and Qurai', Rice held (late 5/4) a joint meeting with Livni and Qurai', but no details were released. She ended the visit with a breakfast meeting with Olmert on 5/5.

Though discussion of core issues remained at an impasse, modest agreements

were reached to facilitate expanded PA security control in the West Bank in keeping with the PA's road map requirements. Just before Bush's 5/14 arrival, Quartet special envoy Tony Blair and U.S. security envoy Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton announced (5/13) that they had mediated a deal to make Jenin a test case for expanded PA control, which the sides hoped would create meaningful change on the ground for both Palestinians and Israelis. Blair cautioned that many details remained to be negotiated and that no target dates for implementation had been set but outlined the arrangement as follows: For a 3-month trial period, a special economic and security zone would be created around Jenin. The PA would have full security control of the area from 6 A.M. to midnight, and Israel and the PA would assume joint security in that area overnight. The IDF would be able to enter the area at any time to stop "ticking bombs," would transfer to the PA the names of wanted men in the area, and would pursue them if the PA did not arrest them. An additional 600 PA security forces currently completing training in Jordan would deploy in 7/08 to augment the 500 newly trained officers that deployed to Jenin on 5/3. With Israel's permission, the PA would build a new police headquarters in Jenin and 4 subsidiary police offices in the area to replace those destroyed by the IDF during the intifada. Israel would allow construction of 2 new industrial zones in Jenin (work reportedly to begin soon by a German firm) and Hebron (many details of this deal are reportedly outstanding); remove roadblocks ("in keeping with security considerations") in the n. West Bank to ease the movement of Palestinians into Jenin, Nablus, and the Jordan Valley; and issue additional work permits for about 1,000 laborers and 300 merchants from Jenin to enter Israel. Israel also agreed to drop opposition to a \$650-m. private business deal to launch a new Palestinian cell phone company that would create 100s of new jobs and lower cell phone prices in the West Bank; to reevaluate some 1,000 demolition orders for illegally built Palestinian homes; and to allow Palestinian customs officers to be stationed at the Allenby Bridge as a prelude to the establishment of a Palestinian border administration.

This news did not diminish the growing pessimism, particularly among Palestinians, who viewed the upcoming Bush visit to celebrate Israel's creation as an insult, especially as no corresponding events had been scheduled to acknowledge the Palestinian Nakba.

(Though Bush still planned to meet with Abbas later in Egypt, the White House announced on 5/7, before he left, that he had turned down a personal request by Egyptian pres. Hosni Mubarak to hold a trilateral meeting with Olmert and Abbas in Sharm al-Shaykh on 5/17 because it “just doesn’t feel right as the best way to advance the negotiations” at this stage.) Indeed, Bush’s visit was unusually supportive of the Jewish state. Highlights included Bush giving the keynote address at an international conference celebrating Israel hosted by Peres in Jerusalem (5/14), touring Masada (5/15), addressing the Knesset (5/15), and hosting (5/15) a U.S. embassy reception honoring Israel (where Bush was effusively praised by a string of Israeli officials and luminaries as perhaps Israel’s greatest friend, moving him to tears). In his speech to the Knesset (boycotted by Israeli Palestinian MKs), Bush praised Israel’s “moral clarity,” hailed Ariel Sharon as “a warrior for the ages,” and compared those seeking dialogue with Hamas, Hizballah, Iran, and Syria to Nazi appeasers (see Doc. D5). His only mention of peace and the Palestinians was to say that he looked forward to Israel’s 120th anniversary, by which time “the Palestinian people will have the homeland they have long dreamed of”—a statement that many Palestinians felt effectively did away with the 2008 target for reaching a final-status agreement. Bush’s tone was all the more galling to Palestinians in that Israel, which normally eases military operations during major diplomatic events such as those surrounding its anniversary celebrations, continued to pound Gaza, making (5/14) major incursions into Abasan (leveling 110 d. of land and 1 Palestinian home) and Jabaliya r.c., exchanging fire with local gunmen, and making air strikes on Gaza City, killing 6 Palestinians. (The Palestinian factions, excluding Hamas, responded with rocket fire, hitting a mall in Ashkelon, wounding 16 Israelis.) Even some Israelis were taken aback by Bush’s statements. Israeli commentator Yaron Dekel called (5/14) the speech “so hawkish and so unilateral in standing alongside of Israel, I’ve never heard this from Bush or any American president.” Meretz MK Yossi Beilin called (5/14) the address “embarrassing . . . a shame and a scandal.” PA PM Fayyad summed up Palestinian disaffection and the persisting gulf with Israel in a speech (5/13) directed “to the people of Israel,” asking: “How can you celebrate [when] the Palestinian people are suffering from your settlements and the

crimes of your settlers and the siege of your state and the conduct of your occupying army?”

### *Intifada Data and Trends*

During the quarter, at least 307 Palestinians and 23 Israelis were killed in Israeli-Palestinian violence (compared to 216 Palestinians and 5 Israeli last quarter), bringing the toll at 5/15 to at least 5,915 Palestinians (including 49 Israeli Arabs and 17 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators), 1,065 Israelis (including 329 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 212 settlers, 520 civilians), and 61 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). An additional 3 Palestinians were killed this quarter in interfactional violence, down from around 12 last quarter (see Intra-Palestinian section below). By way of comparison: The Israel FMin. reported on 5/13 that a total of 3,055 Israelis had been killed in “terrorist attacks” since Israel was founded in 1948.

Data released by the PA Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) on 2/26 put the Palestinian population of the occupied territories at 3.76 m. and the number of Israeli Palestinians at 1.4 m., for a total Palestinian population in Israel and the occupied territories of 5.2 m., compared to a Jewish population of 5.8 m.; according to PCBS, if trends continue, Palestinians will outnumber Jews within 5 years. Hebrew University demographic expert Sergio Della Pergola stated (2/26) that the numbers appeared reliable, noting that they were, in fact, lower than earlier PCBS projections.

Overall this quarter, Israel significantly escalated military attacks on Gaza, with IDF ground incursions targeting the “terrorist infrastructure” and attempts to push the resistance away from the border (to deter Palestinian rocket fire into Israel and defensive border patrols) becoming near-daily events. The IDF made a total of 41 incursions this quarter, repeatedly targeting Abasan, Bayt Hanun, Bayt Lahiya, al-Bureij r.c., Dayr al-Balah, Gaza City, Jabaliya town and r.c., Juhur al-Dik, Khan Yunis, Khuza’a, al-Qarara, Rafah, al-Shuka, and Wadi al-Silqa. All but 2 incursions (Operation Hot Winter 2/28–3/3, and a 4/25–26 raid on Bayt Hanun) lasted less than a day. In the West Bank, daily IDF arrest raids, house searches, house demolitions, closures, and the like, as well as significant settler harassment, continued to take a heavy toll. Of note: The UN reported on 3/31 that IDF curfews on West Bank areas typically imposed during search

and arrest campaigns were growing longer: curfews lasted on average 8 hours in 2007, 9 hours in 1/08, 21 hours in 2/08, and 24 hours in 3/08. Also of note: Many IDF raids in Hebron targeted offices, schools, youth centers, and orphanages run by the Islamic Charitable Association (ICA). Israel declared the ICA an illegal organization affiliated with Hamas on 2/26, demanding that its Hebron services be closed and its buildings vacated and turned over to the IDF by 4/8 for a 3-year period, warning that anyone remaining in the buildings would be considered to be admitting membership in Hamas and thereby be subject to 5 years' imprisonment. (In fact, the ICA is a major philanthropic group, founded in 1962, that runs many services for the poor across the West Bank; Hamas has denied any connection.) Though ICA offices were targeted repeatedly (see Chronology for details), the IDF never followed through on threats to vacate and seize ICA buildings.

*Assassinations, Suicide Attacks, and Heavy Attacks*

This quarter, at least 19 deaths (12 in Gaza, 7 in the West Bank) were clear assassinations (down from 31 last quarter) during which 20 bystanders were wounded. Those assassinated this quarter were the **AMB's** Ibrahim Masimi (2/27) and Ahmad Babul (3/12); **DFLP's** Ibrahim Abu Olba (4/14); **Hamas's** Muhammad Abu al-Hussein (2/27), Muhammad Abu 'Akar (2/27), Abdallah Idwan (2/27), 'Aziz Mas'ud (2/27), Hasan al-Mutawaq (2/27), Eyad al-Ashram (2/29), and Nafiz Mansur (5/1); and **Islamic Jihad's** Muhammad Shihada (3/12), Issa Marzuk (3/12), Imad al-Kamil (3/12), Nidal Shaqqura (targeted 3/18, died 3/23), Abdallah al-Ghussayn (4/15), Bilal Zaalah and an unnamed member (4/16), 'Awad al-Qiq (4/30), and Ussama al-Houbi (targeted 4/30, died 5/2). Attacks targeting 3 Islamic Jihad members (3/18; though 1, Nidal Shaqqura, later died) and 4 Hamas members (1 on 3/1, 1 on 4/20, 2 on 4/22) were clear failed assassination attempts that killed 1 bystander and wounded 21; all targets were in Gaza. An air strike that narrowly missed the home of Gaza City AMB cmdr. Muhammad Hijazi may have been a failed assassination attempt; the strike hit an adjacent home, wounding 1 woman.

This quarter, 2 Palestinian attacks could be considered suicide attacks: Hamas's 4/19 triple car-bombing at the IDF-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing, which wounded 13 IDF soldiers (3 moderately, 10 lightly), and the 3/6 Mercar Harav shooting in Jerusalem

staged by a lone Palestinian gunman (who likely knew he would be killed in the attack), which killed 8 Israeli civilians and wounded 9. The 8 deaths and 22 injuries marked an increase from last quarter, when 1 suicide attack killed 1 and wounded 11.

Of note: The 4/19 Kerem Shalom attack marked the 5th of 7 Palestinian attacks this quarter on or near crossing points into Israel: The AMB, Islamic Jihad, and PRCs jointly claimed responsibility for a 4/9 attack on Nahal Oz (3 Palestinian attackers, 2 Israeli civilian workers killed); Hamas and Islamic Jihad claimed joint responsibility for a 4/16 diversionary attack near Nahal Oz, intended to lure IDF soldiers from the Nahal Oz base into Gaza, where they were ambushed (4 armed Palestinians and 3 IDF soldiers were killed in the exchange); on 4/17, the IDF fatally shot an unidentified armed Palestinian who approached the Kerem Shalom crossing at nearly the same time that an unidentified sniper fired on workers transferring fuel at the Nahal Oz crossing, causing no injuries; at the same time as the 4/19 Kerem Shalom attack, the IDF reported firing on another armed Palestinian approaching another crossing (the crossing was not identified, and the assailant was not injured or captured); and on 5/4, unidentified Palestinians fired a mortar at the Nahal Oz crossing, causing no injuries. All 7 incidents resulted in the temporary closing of the crossings, halting transfer of fuel, food, and other humanitarian supplies. The factions did not explain their motives for the attacks, which were criticized by many Gazans for aggravating the effects of the siege.

The IDF was alarmed by the military sophistication of the 4/16 Nahal Oz and 4/19 Kerem Shalom operations, as well as an incident on 3/18 where Palestinian gunmen firing machine guns and mortars successfully forced the retreat of an IDF special forces unit attempting a late-night incursion into al-Bureij r.c. (no casualties were reported). The 4/19 Hamas attack, using an old PA armored vehicle captured during fighting with Fatah in 6/07 and 2 jeeps painted to resemble IDF jeeps, seemed to be staged to appear as if an IDF convoy were retreating to the crossing under Palestinian fire in order to lure the IDF soldiers into opening the perimeter fence to allow the Hamas members into the IDF base, where they could cause a greater number of casualties and possibly capture a soldier and take him back to Gaza. Indeed, the IDF suffered an uncommonly high number of casualties (8 killed, 27 wounded) during its

incursions into Gaza this quarter, suggesting that the defensive tactics of the factions were improving.

Palestinian rocket fire from Gaza into Israel fluctuated significantly during the quarter, declining during the last 2 weeks of 2/08, spiking sharply during the IDF's Operation Hot Winter (2/28-3/3) to a possible all-time weekly high of 224 for the week 2/27-3/4, then falling to a moderate level of 34/week through 5/15 (though it was rising slightly at the end of the quarter). In total, 3 Israeli civilians were killed this quarter, the first fatalities from rocket fire in 9 months, bringing to 16 the total number of Israelis killed by rockets since Palestinians began using them in 2001 (this includes 2 children killed after accidentally triggering an unexploded rocket). In addition to the fatalities, 31 Israelis were injured by rocket fire this quarter, and damage was reported in at least 17 incidents. In addition, 1 Palestinian boy was killed and 7 Palestinians were injured by rockets fired toward Israel that landed inside the Strip. Israel reported that about 24 of the rockets fired during the quarter (21 during Operation Hot Winter and 3 afterward; most allegedly fired by Hamas, but at least 1 allegedly fired by the PFLP) were Grad-type manufactured rockets that had been smuggled into Gaza, as opposed to the homemade Qassam-style rockets, but this could not be confirmed independently. The alleged Grad strikes injured 24 Israelis (16 in a strike that hit a mall on 5/14) and caused damage in 3 instances.

Meanwhile, the rate of Palestinian mortar fire into Israel this quarter was about half what it was last quarter (32/week versus 62/week). Palestinians also fired 78 mortars at IDF troops inside Gaza during Operation Hot Winter. While Palestinians have fired mortars at Israeli troops inside Gaza previously, this quarter, as the IDF incursions into Gaza became more aggressive and frequent as of 3/26, use of mortars against the troops became routine: Between 3/26 and 5/15, an average of 103 mortars/week were fired at IDF troops inside Gaza. It is uncertain how many of the 8 IDF soldiers killed and 29 wounded in Gaza this quarter were hit by mortar fire as opposed to live fire or roadside bombs. In sum, of the 1,011 rocket and mortar strikes inside Israel, approximately 22 (less than half of 1%) resulted in structural damage or casualties.

#### *Restrictions on Palestinian Movement*

Israel maintained its strict siege on Gaza (first imposed in 6/07 and tightened signif-

icantly in 1/08), barring all exports and allowing in only the minimum amount of food, medicine, and other essential goods to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. Gaza's 2 pedestrian/private vehicle crossings remained almost completely closed: Erez (closed since 3/12/06) allowed passage only to extreme medical emergencies with Israeli permits and select VIPs; Rafah (closed since 6/10/07, except for the 1/23-2/3 breach) also allowed passage only to extreme medical cases, but Egypt unilaterally opened the border on average 1-2 times/wk. to allow medical cases to return to Gaza, permit the repatriation of a few Palestinians and Egyptians stranded on the opposite side of the Rafah border after the breach was sealed, and facilitate travel of reps. of the Gaza factions to and from Cairo for talks with Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulayman regarding a cease-fire with Israel.

In the West Bank, IDF restrictions on movement remained tight. All Palestinian males aged 16-30 from Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarm (some 106,000 men) were barred from traveling south of Nablus without special permission. Restrictions imposed in 7/07 (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 145) barring Palestinians aged 16-25 from traveling southward through 8 major northern checkpoints (Anabta-Kifriyat tunnel and al-Ras in Tulkarm; Awarta, Hawara, and Yitzhar in Nablus; Jit in Qalqilya; Dayr Ballut and Za'atara in Salfit) remained in place. Access to the Jordan Valley for nonresidents remained virtually prohibited, as it has since 10/11/06. New IDF restrictions on travel between Israel and the West Bank imposed in 11/06, including tighter permit restrictions and double security checks on goods, remained in place. Also of note: By 4/1, the IDF had turned the management of 5 West Bank checkpoints into Israel over to private Israeli security firms.

A potentially significant legal development took place this quarter when the Israeli High Court issued (ca. 3/23) a temporary ruling on a petition organized by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) on behalf of Palestinians from 6 villages along Highway 443 n. of Jerusalem requesting that the court lift the IDF ban on Palestinians using the road. The court allowed the ban to stand and gave the state 6 months to report on its efforts to build an alternative road for Palestinians only. Critics warned (3/23) that this might constitute the first legal approval for a segregated road system in the West Bank. (For more on this matter,

see the Settlement Monitor section in this issue.)

#### *House Demolitions and Land-Leveling*

This quarter, the IDF continued to conduct frequent bulldozing operations in the Erez industrial zone (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147) and along the length of Gaza-Israel border to clear lines of sight and increase the IDF's buffer zone. During its border-clearing operations and deeper incursions targeting Gaza's "terrorist infrastructure" this quarter, the IDF razed more than 1,700 d. of Palestinian agricultural land and demolished more than 70 greenhouses, at least 465 beehives, 6 poultry farms, and several animal pens, killing at least 60 sheep and 100s of chickens. In the West Bank, the IDF continued land-leveling operations to make way for the separation wall (see separation wall section below).

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes increased sharply to 83 this quarter from 13 last quarter—the highest quarterly tally since the period 6/28/06–8/15/06 at the start of Operation Summer Rains, when the IDF first reinserted troops into Gaza after the 2005 disengagement (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 141). The spike was largely a result of the increased frequency and severity of IDF incursions into Gaza, where 50 of the demolitions occurred: 23 in the north, 19 in central Gaza, and 8 in the south. Twenty-one of the homes were demolished in Jabaliya and n. Gaza on 3/1–2 alone, during Operation Hot Winter, when the IDF also heavily damaged another 88 houses, displacing more than 750 Palestinians. In the West Bank: 12 demolitions occurred in Hebron, 8 nr. East Jerusalem, 4 each in the Jordan Valley and Tubas (displacing 62 Palestinians total), 3 in Qalqilya, and 1 each in Bethlehem and Jenin.

#### *Settlers and Settlements*

Of special note this quarter: Peace Now reported (3/31) that it had documented new construction underway in 101 Jewish settlements since the 11/07 Annapolis summit, when Israel had reiterated pledges to halt settlement construction in keeping with its road map obligations.

Reports of Jewish settler violence were up slightly this quarter and remained nearly daily occurrences. Incidents included settlers rampaging through Palestinian areas (3/15); beating or otherwise attacking Palestinians (3/13, 3/21, 3/22, 3/23, 3/27, 3/31, 4/9, 4/19, 4/24, 5/2, 5/3, 5/4, 5/5); attempting to occupy Palestinian property to es-

tablish a new settlement outpost (3/13); uprooting Palestinian trees (3/17, 3/28, 4/9, 4/14), stealing or killing livestock (4/2, 4/7, 5/4), and burning crops (5/3); vandalizing Palestinian property (3/13, 3/19, 3/21, 3/22, 3/23, 3/29, 4/3, 4/9, 4/13, 4/28, 4/29, 5/3); stoning Palestinian vehicles (3/7, 4/2, 4/13, 4/14, 4/23); and holding large rallies to call for the expulsion of Palestinians (3/15) and vowing to continue the settlement enterprise (5/8). Of special note: On 3/23, settlers kidnapped 2 young Palestinian shepherds near Nablus on 3/23 and took them to Eli settlement, releasing them only after Palestinian security forces asked the IDF to intervene. There were also 2 reports of deliberate hit-and-runs by Jewish settlers that killed 1 Palestinian teenager (4/7) and injured another (4/3), as well as 5 incidents of settlers firing (3/3, 3/27, 3/31, 4/2, 4/25) on Palestinians (killing 2 Palestinians and wounding 1). On 5/2, Jewish settlers in Hebron attacked a convoy carrying U.S. special envoy Fraser: A settler drove a car into one of the cars in the convoy, forcing Fraser to cut short a visit meant to assess the security situation in the city. Of 40 confirmed settler incidents (up from 32 last quarter), most occurred in Nablus (12) and Hebron (11), with others reported in Qalqilya (5), Ramallah (4), the former Homesh settlement site that was evacuated as part of the 2005 disengagement (2), Jerusalem (2), Salfit (2), Bethlehem (1), and Tulkarm (1). In addition, IDF soldiers broke the windows of Palestinian cars near a settlement outpost in Hebron on 2/22, arguing that the cars posed a threat to the settlers.

#### *Separation Wall*

The UN reported (4/29) that between 9/4/07 and 4/29/08 there was no significant construction on the separation wall and no new sections completed. However, the IDF confiscated (2/21–22) a large swath of Palestinian land (766 d.) for new wall construction in Hebron, which will also render an additional 2,400 d. between the Green Line and the wall off-limits to Palestinians. The wall construction that did occur this quarter was located primarily around Hebron and Jerusalem, while most construction around Bethlehem and Ramallah had stopped. As of the end of the quarter, 57% (250 mi.) of the wall had been completed and 9% (41 mi.) was under construction.

#### *Independent Initiative*

This quarter, former U.S. pres. Jimmy Carter made a controversial personal



approach to Hamas, seeking dialogue on the peace process and the Palestinian situation, particularly in Gaza, and stating firmly that he was not engaging in any back room negotiating. Initially, as of mid-3/08, Carter intended to tour the region as part of a delegation called the Elders, 12 former senior statesmen brought together by Nelson Mandela in 7/07 to form a group whose stature and experience in world affairs could help solve some of the most difficult conflicts around the world. The Elders planned the trip to raise awareness of the urgent need for Israeli-Arab peace and the interlocking nature of the region's conflicts, with stops to include Israel, the West Bank, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, including a meeting with exiled Hamas leader Mishal in Damascus. On 4/8, after Israel denied their request to meet with senior officials during the tour to protest the planned meeting with Mishal, the Elders canceled the trip, and Carter opted to make the tour on his own on behalf of the Carter Center. Israel agreed to let him come but denied him permission to travel to Gaza to meet with Hamas's Haniyeh. Olmert, Livni, and Netanyahu, as well as Abbas, turned down requests to meet. Carter was received 4/13 in a private capacity by Pres. Shimon Peres, who reprimanded him for having "caused many problems in recent years with your comments and meetings" and 4/14 on behalf of the PA by PM Fayyad. During the trip, he also met with the PA's negotiation advisers, various Israeli MKs, U.S. security envoy Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, Syrian pres. Bashar al-Asad, Jordan's King Abdallah, and Saudi Arabia's King Abdallah. The State Dept. urged (4/10) Carter against meeting with Mishal, arguing that it went against U.S. policy of isolating Hamas. Carter, who responded that peace could not be achieved without including Hamas and that he was traveling in a personal capacity, went forward with the 4/13-22 visit.

Carter's consultations with Hamas began with a meeting (4/15) in Ramallah with Haniyeh's ousted Education M Nasser al-Shaer and continued in Cairo (4/17), where senior Hamas officials from Gaza—Mahmud al-Zahar (former PA FM in Haniyeh's government and a co-founder of Hamas), Said Siyam (former PA interior minister in charge of Gaza security), and Ahmed Yousef (Haniyeh's top adviser)—briefed him on conditions there. Carter then went to Syria, where he held (4/18) a 4-hour, closed-door meeting with Mishal. Carter found Mishal's presentation of Hamas's positions so compelling that he

asked Mishal if he would allow him to write up his notes of the meeting, which he would present publicly with Mishal's approval. Mishal consented. After another hour-long meeting with Mishal to go over the text on 4/19, Carter released his summary on 4/21 (see Doc. D4) at the Israel Council on Foreign Relations in Jerusalem, saying that he did not believe that Hamas was determined to destroy Israel and that Mishal had shown enough flexibility to make talks with the group worthwhile. Basically, Mishal stated Hamas's willingness to abide by any peace deal that Abbas might reach, so long as it was endorsed by the Palestinian people through a referendum or vote by the democratically elected government. Hamas also agreed that if Israel approved a list (already presented to Egypt) of Palestinian prisoners for release, it would send captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit to Egypt, to be freed when Israel freed the selected Palestinian prisoners. Mishal clarified in a statement in Damascus on 4/21 that a referendum should include diaspora Palestinians and should not take place until Fatah and Hamas had reconciled and reformed the PLO to include Hamas.

#### INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

As the 1-year anniversary of Hamas's takeover of Gaza neared, deep divisions remained between Hamas and Fatah, though incidents of intra-Palestinian violence were very low. Three Palestinians (2 in Gaza, 1 in the West Bank) were killed in incidents directly related to interfactional fighting (down from 12 last quarter), bringing the total number of fatalities in intra-Palestinian violence since 10/06 to at least 387.

As noted above, Fatah and Hamas engaged (3/18-23) in reconciliation talks in Yemen, but a signed framework agreement to resume detailed national unity talks was quickly revoked by Fatah. Fatah's decision sparked large demonstrations by Palestinian NGOs and citizens in Gaza (5,000 rallied in Gaza City on 3/26, 2,000 in Jabaliya r.c. on 3/28) calling on Fatah and Hamas to resume their dialogue. Exiled Hamas leader Khalid Mishal attempted to revive the dialogue by inviting (3/31) Abbas to visit Gaza to meet with Haniyeh "with no conditions," but when questioned publicly whether he would accept, Abbas angrily refused to answer. (Aides stated that he was insulted by the invitation.) Days later, in an interview with the Palestinian daily *al-Ayyam* published on 4/2, Mishal, in his most explicit

statement to date, said that Hamas would accept the Palestinian and Arab consensus of a two-state solution based on 1967 borders, with a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and the refugees' right of return, as set out in the 2006 prisoners document (see Doc. B8 in *JPS* 140), adding that the only thing left to achieve peace was for the Israelis to "declare their commitment" to this vision. Fatah did not comment.

Of note this quarter: In early 3/08, the final report of a PA committee headed by Tayib 'Abd al-Rahim (secy. to the PA presidency and also a Fatah Central Committee member) charged with investigating why and how the PA lost control of Gaza to Hamas in 6/07 was leaked to the press. At the time the confidential 100-page report was submitted to Abbas in 7/07 (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 145), the only detail made public was the recommendation that some 60 PA security officers be court-martialed for their failure to defend PA institutions. The leaked text shows that the bulk of the report condemned Hamas in detail for plotting and staging a "coup," but that it also contained some 25 pages of conclusions and recommendations, including strong criticism of the PA's lack of vision and planning, of efforts led by former Gaza PA security chief Muhammad Dahlan to build a military force, and of detrimental personal divisions within Fatah's Gaza leadership.

#### ***Hamas-led Gaza***

This quarter there were no organized attempts by Fatah to challenge Hamas's authority in Gaza, though Hamas authorities took a few actions apparently aimed at keeping Fatah in check: Hamas-affiliated police raided (2/24) the PLO Prisoner's Association building in Dayr al-Balah, confiscating documents and furniture, and raided (2/29) a Fatah-affiliated youth club in Nussayrat r.c., also confiscating documents and furniture. Hamas officials dismissed (3/23) the Fatah-affiliated administrative officer at Khan Yunis's College of Science and Technology and named a pro-Hamas officer in his place, sparking a fight with local Fatah supporters; Hamas-affiliated police intervened to disperse the crowd, with no injuries reported. Classes were suspended until Hamas and Fatah could resolve the issue. There were no reports that classes had resumed by the end of the quarter.

Of note: Observers in Gaza reported (*Washington Post* 4/13) that many Gazans laid off because of Israel's siege and the

closure of businesses unable to import raw materials have sought jobs with Hamas—the only organization still hiring. Most of these had taken jobs in the police force or joined the Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades to receive small stipends.

Some interfactional clashes did take place in Gaza this quarter, leaving 2 Palestinians dead and several injured. A previously unknown group called Country's Honor claimed responsibility for the 4/15 murder of a former PA intelligence officer in central Gaza. The other death occurred when DFLP and Hamas members exchanged fire in Rafah on 5/2, killing 1 and wounding 1. Elsewhere, unidentified assailants fired on the home of a senior Hamas member in Gaza (2/20), kidnapped an Islamic Jihad member in al-Bureij r.c. (3/13), shot and wounded a Hamas-affiliated policeman in Dayr al-Balah (3/26); kidnapped and beat (4/24) a former PA security officer affiliated with Fatah in Nussayrat r.c.; and detonated a bomb outside the Jabaliya r.c. home of a Fatah member, injuring him (5/3). Hamas student demonstrations to mark the 4th anniversary of Israel's assassination of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin sparked (3/31) unarmed fights between pro-Fatah and pro-Hamas students and professors on the campus of Gaza City's pro-Fatah al-Azhar University; Hamas-affiliated police broke up the fights, injuring several Palestinians. In addition, a dispute between rival factions of the PFLP in n. Gaza in 5/2 ended in gunfire, but no injuries were reported.

#### ***Fatah in the West Bank***

Tensions also roiled just below the surface in the West Bank. In late 2/08, Hamas-affiliated imam Majid Barghouti (arrested in a PA raid in Ramallah on 2/14), a healthy 44 year old, died (2/22) under torture in PA General Intelligence custody in Ramallah. The death sparked clashes between Barghouti family members and PA security forces in Ramallah on 2/24, causing no reported injuries. Abbas immediately ordered (2/22) a commission of inquiry comprising PC members representing independents and all factions except Fatah and Hamas. The commission concluded (4/3) that the General Intelligence Service was "fully legally and morally responsible" for Barghouti's death and urged Abbas to take legal action against General Intelligence head Tawfiq Tirawi and other implicated officers. (There was no evidence that this was done by the end of the quarter.) The report also found evidence that torture was used routinely against

political prisoners in PA jails and demanded that the PA halt all forms of physical and psychological torture against detainees in keeping with international law.

Of note: Citing Abbas's failure to achieve any gains to date for the Palestinians, AMB Jenin commander Zakariya Zubaydi and several other AMB members announced (4/7) that they would no longer agree to stay in PA custody overnight, which was part of a deal they agreed to in 7/07 to receive amnesty from Israel. Zubaydi did not threaten to resume resistance operations, but noted that some AMB cadres were so demoralized by the 7/07 amnesty agreement's failure to produce any improvement on the ground that they were leaving the group and joining Islamic Jihad to take up arms again. On 4/4, 12 other AMB members who were part of the amnesty deal fled their voluntary PA custody in Jnaid prison in Nablus, claiming they had been severely beaten by PA security forces. They said they would not return to PA custody but would continue to adhere to their cease-fire pledge.

Some interfactional skirmishes were reported in the West Bank this quarter. In Hebron, Palestinian Polytechnic University suspended (3/27) classes after a dispute on the student council sparked unarmed clashes between Fatah and PFLP student groups. Hebron University suspended classes on 4/12 because of similar unarmed clashes between Fatah and Hamas student groups. Students at Birzeit University brawled (4/22) over student council elections results that gave 25 seats to Fatah, 19 to Hamas, and 5 each to the PFLP and a joint Islamic Jihad/People's Party list, prompting the university to close the campus until tensions cooled.

### ***New PA Security Contingents***

Of great importance this quarter was the continued expansion of PA security in the West Bank, under the direction of U.S. security envoy Lt. Gen. Dayton and as required by the road map and Annapolis agreements. Even though PA security reform was being led by the U.S., and Israel itself demanded expanded PA security control as a precondition for further IDF withdrawals, Israel was resistant, insisting that the IDF retain ultimate freedom of action (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147). Israel continued this quarter to deliberately frustrate the U.S.-PA efforts by blocking a shipment of U.S.-funded body armor, helmets, uniforms, socks, boots, canteens, flashlights, first aid kits, tarps, and other nonlethal equipment to newly trained PA security forces. Israel had also imposed

limits on the curriculum being taught to the PA forces at a Western-led program in Jordan, as well as the training equipment they were allowed to use. Americans involved in the training (see *Washington Post* 3/15, 5/3) called it "a complete fiasco." Several resigned in protest over the inadequacies, saying that students received "communications training with no radios, drivers' training with no vehicles, mounted patrol tactics with no vehicles, no course handouts or student manuals." Some trainers reported purchasing pistol-shaped cigarette lighters to use as dummy guns and using their personal cars for defensive driving classes. Moreover, classes were taught in English while most trainees spoke only Arabic. Another American adviser called the training "grossly negligent" in terms of what the PA needed to provide security.

Dep. Secy. of State Welch briefed Congress on 3/12 regarding U.S.-funded training of a 600-member PA police battalion on tactics for maintaining law and order, as well as instruction by officers from the State Dept.'s Bureau of Diplomatic Security of a 460-member Presidential Guard unit on how to handle VIPs. (In summer 2007, Congress approved an initial \$28 m. for training, out of \$86 m. appropriated for PA security. The rest of the \$86 m. had not yet been approved for disbursement.) He praised the training programs as a success, alerting Congress about the administration's plans to ask for an additional \$50 m. to train more units in 2008 and 2009. (The request was submitted on 5/2.)

The 600-member police battalion referred to by Welch began operating in Jenin on 5/3 after Rice pressed (3/31) Israel to allow the deployment (see "Rice Tries Again," above). (Two similar units had been deployed in Nablus and Tulkarm since 11/07). The PA welcomed Israel's approval, though it stated (3/25) that Jenin was not where forces were needed most. (It had wanted to send them to Hebron, but Israel had refused.) As noted above (see "Waning Hope for a 2008 Deal"), Dayton and Quartet envoy Blair secured Israel's agreement (5/13) to allow Jenin to be a test case for greater PA economic and security control that may be expanded elsewhere, though details were still being worked out at the end of the quarter.

Perhaps in part as a result of their inadequate training, the new PA security units continued to cause controversy this quarter for acting on behalf of and employing tactics reminiscent of the IDF (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147). For example,

the Jenin contingent's first major action was to make a predawn incursion into Qabatya, an Islamic Jihad stronghold, on 5/6, where they clashed with local gunmen, critically shooting a Palestinian student in the head and 2 Islamic Jihad members in the legs. An anonymous senior Western security official commented (5/6) that "if you're going into Qabatya, you're not going after car thieves," calling this the PA's first serious effort to crack down on West Bank militant groups. On 4/2, the Tulkarm contingent imposed a night curfew on Kafr Thuluth near Qalqilya to prevent clashes between feuding families.

### ***Fatah Internal Affairs***

By 2/22, Fatah had postponed indefinitely its long-delayed 6th General Conference to elect a new Fatah leadership, which had been tentatively set for 3/08. (The last General Conference was held in 1989.) According to veteran Fatah member Qaddura Fares, the existing Fatah leadership believed that "we can't convene the 6th conference now with all these internal differences. Because instead of achieving unity, we would then be consolidating disunity and Fatah would come out of the conference in much worse shape." Concerns seemed to revolve around a committee, headed by Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) member Nasser al-Kidwa, that had been formed to draft a new Fatah political program to give the movement renewed "organizational coherence and discipline." Instead, differences of opinion on the program threatened to aggravate political splits within the movement and possibly spark defections. The postponement came even though Fatah had made serious preparations for the conference: Fatah's Organization and Mobilization Dept. had set up a database of Fatah members in the occupied territories and held local, district, and regional elections throughout the West Bank to select conference delegates. Similar elections to select delegates from the exile communities, which a Tunis-based Fatah Central Command committee had been charged with organizing, had not been held. Furthermore, no decision had been made on a venue/venues for the General Conference. (Logistics must be worked out so that delegates from the territories and exile communities can convene in one place or remotely by teleconference.)

### **PALESTINIAN OPINION**

*The following data are excerpted from a poll conducted by the Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research*

***(PCPSR) between 13 and 15 March 2008. Results are based on a survey of 1,270 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. The poll, the 27th in a series, was taken from PCPSR's Web site at [www.pcpsr.org](http://www.pcpsr.org).***

**1. If new presidential elections were to take place today, with Mahmud Abbas nominated by Fatah and Ismail Haniyeh nominated by Hamas, for whom would you vote?**

	West Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Abbas	47.0%	45.6%	46.4%
b. Haniyeh	45.4%	49.0%	47.0%
c. Don't know	7.6%	5.4%	6.6%

**2. After the separation between Gaza and the West Bank, Hamas and the government of Ismail Haniyeh remained in power in Gaza and considered itself the legitimate government, while Pres. Abbas formed a new government headed by Salam al-Fayyad, and it too considered itself legitimate. Which of the two governments do you consider legitimate?**

	West Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Haniyeh's	32.1%	37.3%	34.0%
b. Abbas's	26.0%	33.9%	28.8%
c. Both	9.6%	8.8%	9.3%
d. Neither	28.0%	18.2%	24.4%
e. Don't know	4.3%	1.8%	3.4%

**3. What are your expectations regarding the chances for the success or failure of the negotiations launched at the Annapolis conference? Will [the negotiations] succeed or fail in ending Israeli occupation?**

	West Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Certainly will succeed	0.5%	0.2%	0.4%
b. Will succeed	12.6%	14.4%	13.3%
c. Will fail	50.3%	47.1%	49.1%
d. Certainly will fail	29.3%	33.4%	30.8%
e. Don't know	7.3%	4.9%	6.4%

**4. Concerning armed attacks against Israeli civilians inside Israel, I . . .**

	West Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Strongly support them	23.9%	34.9%	27.9%
b. Support them	38.4%	38.8%	38.6%
c. Oppose them	30.0%	25.1%	28.2%
d. Strongly oppose them	3.7%	1.0%	2.7%
e. Don't know	4.1%	0.2%	2.7%

## FRONTLINE STATES

## JORDAN

Jordan was not deeply involved in the peace process this quarter. King Abdallah met with Pres. Bush at the White House on 3/4 and 4/23 for talks on the Middle East, during which he appealed to the U.S. to ensure that the Israeli-Palestinian final-status talks were based on "clear grounds and fixed timetables." Abdallah also held consultations with Abbas in Amman on 3/10 and in Washington on 4/23.

Also of note: Jordanian authorities banned a rally in support of Palestinians in Gaza planned for 4/18 after Friday prayers.

## LEBANON

The main event of this quarter was the outbreak of fighting between Hizballah and March 14 coalition forces, largely brought on by outside interference.

*Lebanon's Presidential Crisis*

As the quarter opened, Arab League Secy.-Gen. 'Amr Musa canceled (ca. 2/22) a planned visit to Beirut set for 2/23 to follow up on an Arab League power-sharing proposal launched last quarter for a solution to the Lebanese presidential crisis (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147) after a visit by his envoy in mid-2/08 failed to narrow differences between the governing coalition and the Hizballah-led opposition. Presidential elections were postponed for a 15th time on 2/25, moving the date to 3/11.

Responding to the latest postponement, the White House dispatched (2/25) the guided missile destroyer *USS Cole* from Malta to international waters off the coast of Lebanon in a "show of support for regional stability" out of "concern about the situation in Lebanon." The *Cole* was joined several days later by the amphibious warship the *USS Nassau*. The U.S. maneuver recalled the U.S. deployment of warships off the coast of Lebanon in 1983, when U.S. ships shelled areas in and around the Chouf in support of the Christian Phalangists. When the deployment became known, Hizballah immediately denounced (2/29) it as a military threat and potentially destabilizing to the entire region. PM Fuad Siniora also quickly distanced himself, stating (2/29) that his government had not asked the U.S. to intervene and that he had summoned (2/28) the U.S. chargé d'affaires for clarification. On 2/29, anonymous U.S. and Arab officials acknowledged that the U.S. deployment was part

of a joint campaign by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, first discussed by Bush and King Abdallah during Bush's visit to Riyadh in 1/08, to pressure Syria through a series of military, economic, and diplomatic steps to end its interference in Lebanon prolonging the constitutional crisis. (The U.S. expanded some economic sanctions on Syria last quarter; see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147.) In keeping with the plan, Saudi Arabia quietly recalled its ambassador to Syria on 2/28, advised its citizens to leave Lebanon immediately on 3/1, deposited (by 3/8) \$1 b. into Lebanon's central bank in a show of support for the Siniora government, and began lobbying (ca. 3/1) Arab leaders to boycott the upcoming 3/29-30 Arab League summit in Damascus to send a message to Syria that it must break its ties with Iran and stop meddling in Lebanon. An anonymous Saudi official stated on 3/8 that the "new initiative [aims] to completely isolate Syria and weaken its destructive influence in Lebanon." In parallel, Saudi officials held (ca. 3/2) quiet consultations with Iranian officials in Cairo to discuss possible alterations to Musa's Arab League proposals for Lebanon in a way that would appease both sides in the Lebanese dispute. In early 3/08, the *USS Ross* (another guided missile destroyer) and *USS Philippine Sea* (a guided missile cruiser) replaced the *Cole* and the *Nassau*. They remained off shore until early 4/08 and then head to the Gulf.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts failed to broker a resolution to the presidential standoff, prompting Lebanese speaker Nabih Birri to postpone elections twice more, to 3/25 and then 4/25. As the 4/25 deadline approached, U.S. Asst. Secy. of State David Welch arrived (4/17) in Lebanon on a previously unannounced visit, ostensibly to attend a ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the 1983 Marine barracks bombing on 4/18. He met (4/17) with PM Siniora, Speaker Birri (aligned with the opposition), and Druze leader and close U.S. ally Walid Jumblatt (aligned with the March 14 coalition) for talks on the ongoing presidential stalemate. Welch rejected Birri's call for the U.S. to press the governing coalition for immediate reopening of the national dialogue in advance of a presidential vote, affirming the U.S. position that a president should be elected before resuming national unity talks. Welch then allegedly encouraged Jumblatt to escalate the political situation to force through election of a president, giving vague assurances that the U.S. would support such a move. On 4/22, Birri

postponed elections indefinitely, refusing to set a new date. Musa returned to Beirut on 5/1 in a fresh effort to broker a deal to end the presidential crisis, but made no headway.

### ***Outbreak of Fighting in Beirut***

At this juncture, the Siniora government declared (5/6) illegal a private fixed-line telephone network covering s. and e. Lebanon set up and run by Hizballah, calling it a threat to national security and secretly sending a memorandum on the phone network to the UN Security Council. (The telephone network, though long known in government and army circles, had become an issue after Jumblatt revealed it publicly some days earlier.) At the same time, the government fired Brig. Gen. Wafiq Shuqair as security chief of Beirut airport for failing to take action against Hizballah's installation of security cameras at the airport, which the government had strenuously denounced the previous week. (The security cameras were claimed to monitor diplomatic traffic, but government supporters contended that their real purpose was to record the incognito movements in and out of the country of loyalist political figures, making them vulnerable to assassination. Some analysts [e.g., *Independent* 5/8] suggested the cameras constituted an early warning network to monitor a runway that ends near the sea and could be used for a small seaborne incursion by Israeli troops to attack Hizballah strongholds in s. Beirut.) Hizballah immediately protested the move and, along with its allies Amal and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), set up roadblocks leading to the airport, forcing its closure, and along other major routes in the capital to pressure the government to reverse the decisions, sparking clashes with gunmen affiliated with Saad Hariri's Future Movement that left 7 wounded.

In a nationally televised speech on the evening of 5/8, Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah accused Siniora of launching a war against the movement and warned of greater conflict if the 5/6 decisions were not reversed. He noted that when Siniora became PM in 2005, he had prioritized "supporting the resistance" and giving it a free hand to wage its "war of liberation" against Israel in any way it saw fit. The phone and surveillance networks were then already in place, he said, and had been crucial to Hizballah's defense during the 2006 war with Israel. After the speech, fighters of Hizballah and its allies moved into areas of West Beirut itself, and clashes broke out in earnest, es-

pecially in the mixed Sunni-Shi'i neighborhoods of Mazra'a and Ras al-Naba'a, leaving 6 Lebanese dead and 8 wounded.

Fighting remained intense throughout the morning of 5/9. The army, whose composition reflects Lebanon's sectarian divisions, stood aside, its command having decided that to intervene would have led to a split in the ranks that risked destroying Lebanon's last functioning national institution; officially, the army said that soldiers would keep peace but not take sides, intervening only to contain clashes and negotiate settlements between militias. In the course of the fighting, Hizballah and its allies attacked and shut down the media outlets (television, newspaper) owned by Hariri's Future Movement. Hizballah also took over several government offices but immediately turned them over to the army to underscore that it had no intention of staging a coup. Christian Lebanese groups, whether they supported the government or the opposition, stayed out of the fighting. (Hizballah never approached East Beirut or any of the Christian-dominated areas.)

By early afternoon of 5/9, the battle in West Beirut had been decided, though some fighting continued in the Sunni-majority cities of Sidon and Tripoli and in the Druze town of Aley. Hariri's forces had collapsed and Jumblatt, with few forces in the capital, was confined to his West Beirut residence under army protection. (Unable to reach his stronghold in the Chouf, he suffered the humiliation of having to appeal to his rival, the pro-Syrian clan leader Talal Arslan, to mediate with Hizballah concerning the transfer of his militia and their weapons to the army.) By the evening of 5/9, Hizballah had pulled most of its men out of West Beirut after having turned its positions, and the prisoners and weapons it had captured, over to the army, whose tanks and armored vehicles deployed throughout the city. Meanwhile, the government offered (5/9) to "suspend" the two decisions that had precipitated the fighting and to allow the Lebanese army command, headed by Gen. Michel Suleiman (the consensus candidate for president), to decide them. At the close of 5/9, at least 14 Lebanese (mostly civilians) had been killed and 10s wounded since 5/6. Hizballah's aggressions outraged many Lebanese, who denounced the movement for breaking its vow never to turn its weapons against the Lebanese people.

While the fighting in West Beirut had ended, the crisis was by no means over, even

though Suleiman announced (5/10) that the army would retain the head of airport security in his post and would "investigate" the issue of Hizballah's private phone network in "a way that would safeguard both Hizballah's security and the public interest." Hizballah still maintained its patrols and roadblocks on the eastern and southern outskirts of the city, particularly around the airport, which remained closed.

The events of preceding days had dredged up deep resentments that were hard to contain, and violence in fact escalated over the next several days, threatening to spin out of control. Some Future Movement supporters, angered by their humiliating defeat in Beirut, attacked (5/10) Hizballah and SSNP offices in n. Lebanon and the Biqa' Valley, leaving 12 Lebanese dead (at least 11 of them SSNP members) and 20 wounded. Heavy clashes were also reported (5/10) in Tripoli (between supporters of Future Movement and Alawi members of the Arab Democratic Party seeking to settle Sunni-Alawi scores from the 1980s). Hizballah and Jumblatt supporters exchanged fire (5/11) in the villages of Aley, Kayfun, and Shuwayfat s. of Beirut. In one notable incident, Hizballah sent (5/11) fighters from the Biqa' Valley westwards over the mountains in the upper Chouf, threatening Mukhtara, the Jumblatt family's ancient stronghold, but they were ambushed en route in the tiny village of Mristi by Druze fighters (some of whom had supported the opposition and stood with Hizballah until it moved deep into the Chouf, then switching sides to defend the Druze heartland). After a fierce battle and heavy casualties, the Hizballah fighters were able to withdraw, but only after hours of heated negotiations. They wisely did not return with a larger force.

Meanwhile, in Cairo, the Arab League convened (5/11) an emergency session and dispatched a high-level delegation led by Qatar (which had good relations with Iran and Syria) to Beirut on 5/12 to help resolve the political crisis. (Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which had been involved in mediation in the past but were vocally critical of Iran and Hizballah, did not participate.) Lebanese political leaders across the spectrum, but Nasrallah and Jumblatt in particular, were taken aback by the fighting that took place after the situation in Beirut had calmed, especially the engagements in the mountains. They realized the serious possibility that the civil war could reignite in ways that they would not be able to control and that would

be devastating to Lebanon, so they agreed to the Arab League delegation's appeal to go to Doha for talks. (Pro-government Christian leader Samir Geagea reportedly wanted to hold out for concessions from Hizballah before agreeing to talks, but Jumblatt threatened to withdraw his reps. from the government if Geagea did not agree unconditionally to go to Doha.)

As isolated clashes continued outside Beirut on 5/13, some Christian, Druze, and Sunni supporters of the ruling coalition issued a statement saying they felt abandoned by the U.S. for its failure to intervene during the previous week's violence. In statements to the press, Bush vowed (5/13) that the international community would not allow Lebanon to fall under foreign domination and that "we will help" Siniora's government. Asked if the U.S. might take military action to back Siniora, Bush said, "There's always that option." (On 5/14, the State Dept. said it would speed assistance to the Lebanese army, which said it would accept the aid as long as it was not predicated on cracking down on Hizballah.)

After the Lebanese army warned (late on 5/13) that it would begin using force to quell clashes if a cease-fire did not hold, the fighting ceased. Lebanese security officials estimated (5/13) that 62 Lebanese had been killed and around 200 wounded since 5/6. On 5/15, after 2 days of intensive meetings between Lebanese leaders and the Arab League delegation, the Hizballah-led opposition and Lebanon's ruling coalition agreed to continue talks in Qatar on 5/16 toward an agreement on a cabinet and new electoral law, to be followed by the election of Suleiman as president. (This marked a concession by the ruling coalition, which wanted to elect Suleiman immediately and then hold talks on the cabinet and electoral law.) Hizballah removed (5/15) roadblocks leading to Beirut airport, allowing some flights to resume in the evening.

Though this resolution marked an apparent victory for Hizballah, the previous week's events had aggravated Sunnis' sense of disempowerment, leaving tensions very high. While Hizballah unquestionably showed itself the stronger party and even enhanced its reputation for discipline, a number of Lebanese commentators remarked that it had been a "Pyrrhic victory." Hizballah's violent reaction to the government decisions took Lebanon by surprise, deepening the Sunni-Shi'a tensions and severely tarnishing Hizballah's image as "national defender" by

breaking its vow never to turn its weapons against the Lebanese people.

#### *Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*

Omitted from last quarter's update: At a ceremony in Beirut on 1/7/08 marking Fatah's 43d anniversary, Abbas Zaki, the PLO Executive Committee's rep. to Lebanon, issued a statement on behalf of the PLO (see Doc. B1) acknowledging that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon has often aggravated Lebanese social and political divisions, in particular during the 1975-82 civil war phase, stating unconditionally that "we apologize for any harm that we caused to our dear Lebanon, consciously or not" and seeking dialogue, reconciliation, and resolution of all outstanding problems between Lebanon and the refugee community. Of particular note, the statement declared that "weapons among Palestinians in Lebanon should be subject to the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and its laws in accordance with the requirement of national security," alluding to the chaotic security situation in the camps leading up to the "regrettable" 5-9/07 fighting in Nahr al-Barid r.c. (see Quarterly Updates in *JPS* 145, 146). The statement further pledged the PLO's "complete and immediate preparedness to reach a mutual understanding with the Lebanese government" on the status of Palestinian weapons in the camps. Around the same time, the PLO also reached an agreement with the Lebanese government to open an office in Beirut, though this had not been done by the end of the quarter.

This quarter, Lebanese officials said (4/1) they would begin giving documentation to Lebanon's roughly 3,000 "non-ID" Palestinians (mostly Palestinians who secretly entered Lebanon in the 1970s to fight with the PLO, their spouses, and descendants) who had been barred from working legally, receiving refugee aid, or even leaving refugee camps because of lack of legal documentation.

#### *Israeli-Lebanese Security Issues*

Israel conducted (4/6-10) military exercises simulating simultaneous attacks by Hamas from Gaza, Syria from the Golan, and Hizballah from Lebanon. The Lebanese government, Hizballah, and Syria all put their forces on alert in case Israel exploited the war games to take some sort of action against Lebanon. UNIFIL asked (ca. 4/6) Israel to send reassuring messages to Beirut and Damascus to calm the situation, and Israel complied on 4/7. Also of note: On 4/24,

the UN reported that Israel had stepped up the pace of daily violations of Lebanon's air space from 282 in 2/08 to 692 in 3/08 and to 476 in the first half of 4/08 alone.

Israel accused (4/28) UNIFIL of intentionally concealing information about Hizballah activities in s. Lebanon to avoid conflict with the group, alleging that in the previous 6 months, UNIFIL had on at least 4 occasions failed to confront Hizballah members it had witnessed transporting weapons and had sought to cover up the incidents by not submitting full reports to the UNSC. UNIFIL denied the charges.

Also of note: Human Rights Watch released (2/17) a long-anticipated report on Israel's use of cluster munitions during the 2006 war on Lebanon, which concludes that Israel was "indiscriminate and disproportionate" in its use of the weapons and urges the international community to approve a treaty banning the manufacture, stockpiling, and use of cluster bombs.

#### *Hariri Investigation*

After reviewing the work of his predecessors, David Bellemare, incoming UN investigator into the 2/05 assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri, released (3/28) his first report, stating that a "criminal network" seemed to be behind the assassination of Hariri and nearly 20 others since then, though the investigation was ongoing. The statement diverges from previous reports which have stressed a possible Syrian government connection.

Of note: French PM Bernard Kouchner reported (4/8) that Muhammad Zuhayr Siddiq, a Syrian thought to be a key witness in the UN investigation of the Hariri assassination, disappeared from house arrest in France. Bellemare said (4/8) that Siddiq had recently been interviewed by his team but had not responded to offers to enter witness protection in exchange for testimony. Siddiq was detained by France in 2006 in connection with the Hariri case, but France refused to extradite him, believing he could face the death penalty in Syria.

#### **SYRIA**

Even while Syria was under pressure from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to end interference in Lebanon aimed at prolonging the Lebanese presidential crisis (see Lebanon section above and Regional Affairs section below), significant steps were underway to revive Israeli-Syrian peace talks.



### ***Prospects for Reviving Talks with Israel***

In an interview with the Israeli daily *Yedi'ot Abaronot* in mid-4/08, Israeli PM Olmert stated that "I am very interested in a peace process with Syria. I've been acting on this issue, and I hope that my efforts mature into something meaningful." A week later, Syrian cabinet minister Buthayna Sha'ban stated (4/24) that Olmert had sent (4/22) a message to Pres. Bashar al-Asad via Turkish PM Tayyip Recep Erdogan to the effect that Israel would be willing to withdraw from all of the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria. (Turkey launched efforts to revive the track in 4/07 and has since passed messages between the Olmert and Asad regimes exploring the possibility of resuming talks, without any notable progress; see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 144) Israeli FMin. spokesman Arye Mekel would not confirm or deny the content of Olmert's message, but stated (4/24) that "Israel wants peace with Syria; we are interested in a negotiation process. The Syrians know well our expectations, and we know well their expectations." The next day, Asad commented (4/25) in an interview with the Syrian daily *al-Watan* that he would be open to holding direct talks with Israel, provided they took place under U.S. auspices after the Bush administration leaves office.

At the same time, former U.S. pres. Carter, who met with Asad during his 4/13-22 regional tour (see "Independent Initiative" in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict section above), stated (4/21) that Syria seemed "eager" to resume peace talks with Israel "as soon as possible," adding that "all of our group were surprisingly impressed with [Asad's] strength and knowledge of the details [of negotiations to date] in contrast to what we had heard from propaganda." Carter said that Asad gave him the impression that Syria's relations with Iran were an alternative to relations with the U.S. and the West, which Asad would prefer, and that Syria would be willing to break ties with Iran to make peace with Israel. Secy. of State Rice dismissed (4/30) Carter's analysis, however, stating that "it is hard to see there is a Syrian regime receptive to negotiations with Israel at this point," calling Syria "Iran's sidecar."

### ***Syria's Purported Nuclear Site***

Indeed, the peace feelers and Carter's statements were ill-timed from the perspective of the Bush administration, which was playing up fears of a nuclear Syria. At a

hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on 4/24, Bush administration officials presented key lawmakers with Israeli-supplied still photos (not video, as first reported) taken inside the Syrian installation bombed by Israel on 9/6/07 (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 146). The photo montage, which purported to show North Korean workers constructing a nuclear reactor for producing plutonium for nuclear weapons that was only weeks or months away from completion, was given as a PowerPoint presentation and included a voice-over that viewers said gave the "feel of a cold-war-era newsreel about the Korean war." During testimony, 2 U.S. intelligence experts stated that the evidence left them with "low confidence" that the site could be part of a nuclear weapons program because it lacked basic components such as a plutonium reprocessing plant as well as signs of uranium or other fuel capabilities. Those who viewed the photos said (*New York Times* 4/25) that many appeared to have been taken before 2002 and that the only photo showing individuals was of Syrian and North Korean officials together, but apparently not at the targeted site. Other nuclear experts (e.g., Harvard's Graham Allison in *New York Times* 4/25) expressed amazement that U.S. intelligence agencies could not uncover a nuclear program allegedly 8 years in the works and operating within 100 miles of the Iraqi border, when they were specifically charged with searching for one, while Israeli intelligence apparently could. Syrian amb. to the U.S. Imad Mustapha discounted the evidence altogether: "Remember that the U.S. went to the UN Security Council and displayed 'evidence' and images of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq."

The evidence now suggests that the administration's aim in declassifying the images 6 months after the Israeli attack was not primarily to build a case against Syria but to advance its own foreign policy agenda regarding North Korea, an interpretation further supported by the fact that the White House released the material to Congress and not to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for investigation. According to anonymous U.S. officials cited in the *New York Times* (4/24), the move had been encouraged by administration hawks (especially VP Cheney, who hoped it would scuttle a potential diplomatic deal with North Korea that would remove it from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, automatically relieving some economic sanctions.

The administration reportedly preferred to keep sanctions in place to force the collapse of the Pyongyang regime rather than reach accommodation with it. Others speculated that the release of the photos was meant to force North Korea to give details about its work with Syria as part of the U.S. demand that North Korea provide full accounting of its past nuclear activities and dismantle its nuclear facilities as a prerequisite for any diplomatic agreement. After the committee hearings, Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-MI) stated (4/24) that, whatever the rationale, committee members felt "that we were used today by the administration because . . . they had other agendas in mind" and that the administration's failure to share intelligence on the Syrian site immediately upon receipt had "really damaged the relationship between Congress and the administration." IAEA head Mohamed ElBaradei also criticized the U.S. for not making its evidence available immediately and reiterated (4/24) his criticism of Israel for attacking the site, declaring that the states should have presented their concerns to the IAEA to allow a proper investigation that could have confirmed facts. (The U.S. officially submitted the evidence to the IAEA by 5/7, and at the end of the quarter ElBaradei was in talks with the Syrian government regarding allowing IAEA inspectors to visit the destroyed site.)

Briefing the press after the hearings, an unnamed senior administration official, self-described as a "central player in Bush's deliberations," admitted for the first time that the White House and Israel had "extensive discussions" before the 9/6 attack, with some in the U.S. administration proposing to confront Syria with the evidence and demand that it "halt all its nefarious activity," including meddling in Lebanon, or face an attack. Israel and other administration officials dismissed this option, arguing that the site posed an immediate "existential threat to Israel" because it was "nearing operational capability." The official said that Israel then launched the attack without asking for or receiving a green light from the U.S.

## REGIONAL AFFAIRS

The annual Arab League heads of state summit was held (3/29-30) this quarter in Damascus. Following preparatory meetings in Cairo on 2/21, which noted the lack of progress on Israeli-Palestinian final-status talks and continuing Israeli settlement ex-

pansion, Arab FMs warned that if Israel did not give a positive response soon to the 2002 Arab League initiative (full normalization in exchange for a full withdrawal from occupied lands), they might rescind the offer. Arab League secy.-gen. 'Amr Musa sharply reiterated this threat on 3/5 in light of Operation Hot Winter and again on 3/11 in light of Israel's announced plans to expand settlements. However, when the Arab League FMs convened (3/28) in Damascus to debate a statement to be approved at the summit, they were unable to reach consensus, and no statement was made either reiterating support for or retracting the 2002 initiative. (Of note: On 3/28, the day before the session was to open, 50,000 supporters of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah al-Yasir [an offshoot of the AMB] held a peaceful rally in n. Gaza calling on the Arab League states to find a way to break Israel's siege of Gaza.)

Instead, the summit was dominated by the escalating presidential crisis in Lebanon (see Lebanon section above). Lebanon itself boycotted the Damascus summit to protest Syrian interference in its affairs, while Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen sent low-level delegations. As the summit opened, Saudi FM Prince Saud al-Faisal convened (3/29) a press conference in Riyadh to urge the Arab League to punish Syria for undermining efforts to reach a solution to the Lebanese crisis, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and the situation in Iraq. Syrian pres. Bashar al-Asad's address to the session was mild; he focused on seeking new ways to move the peace process forward, denied meddling in Lebanon, ignored the Arab boycotts of the meeting, and instead portrayed the summit as a Syrian success, noting that 11 heads of state had attended despite broad U.S. hints that it would prefer that Arab leaders not participate. No major decisions were taken at the session; the final statement merely encouraged a quick resolution of the Lebanese situation and expressed concern over the Palestinian situation. Afterward, several follow-up meetings were held (ca. 3/31-4/2) among the PA's Abbas, Egypt's Mubarak, Jordan's King Abdallah, and Saudi Arabia's King Abdallah to review efforts on the peace process and Lebanese presidential crisis. Some Arab analysts expressed concern (e.g., *Mideast Mirror* 4/3) that these events surrounding the summit might mark the solidification of Saudi-led "moderate bloc" that would increasingly try to advance U.S. goals in the region.

In terms of regional trends, the U.S. polling firm Zogby International released (4/14) its 7th annual Arab public opinion poll, surveying more than 4,000 Arabs in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The results showed a decline in positive views of the U.S. since 2006, with 64% of respondents saying they hold a "very unfavorable" opinion of the U.S. Asked to name 2 countries that pose the "biggest threat" to them, 95% named Israel and 88% the U.S., compared to 85% and 72%, respectively, in 2006; 11% named Iran (up fr. 7% in 2006). Also, 67% (up from 61% in 2006) believed that Iran had the right to pursue its nuclear program and that international pressure to freeze its nuclear program should cease; 75% of Saudis thought it would be a positive thing if Iran had a nuclear weapon. Some 85% of respondents named Palestine among their top 3 most important issues/causes, up from 77% in 2006 and 69% in 2005, with sharp rises among Egyptians and Saudis. Asked to identify which foreign leader they admired the most, the most popular leader was Hizballah's Hasan Nasrallah (26% up from 14% in 2006); second was Syrian pres. Asad (16% up from 2% in 2006), and third was Iranian pres. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (10% up from 4% in 2006).

Also of note: Israeli FM Livni attended (4/14-15) the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development, and Free Trade at Qatar's invitation.

## INTERNATIONAL

### UNITED STATES

This quarter, the Bush admin. attempted to keep up momentum on the Israeli-Palestinian final-status talks relaunched at the 11/07 Annapolis summit by sending Secy. of State Rice to the region 3 times (3/4-5, 3/29-31, 5/3-5) to urge the sides to narrow their differences. By the end of the quarter, however, the administration seemed to realize that an agreement by the end of 2008 was unlikely due to the inability of Israel and the Palestinians to reach agreements on their own, the administration's own refusal to intervene to broker concessions, and Olmert's waning popularity amid new fraud allegations against him. In the U.S., attention shifted to the presidential campaign (with focus on the candidates' positions on the Middle East), and little legislative action was taken as Congress headed into summer recess.

### *Congressional Action*

On 3/5, the House passed (404-1, with 4 voting present, 19 abstaining) H.R. 951, which condemned ongoing Palestinian rocket fire on Israeli civilians, holding both Iran and Syria responsible for "sponsoring terror attacks" and declaring that "those responsible for launching rocket attacks against Israel routinely embed their production facilities and launch sites amongst the Palestinian civilian population, utilizing them as human shields." The measure also strongly defended Israel's Operation Hot Winter, stating that there is no "moral equivalence" between "the inadvertent inflicting of civilian casualties as a result of defensive military operations" and "the deliberate targeting of civilian populations as practiced by Hamas and other Gaza-based terrorist groups." The one rep. voting against was presidential candidate Ron Paul (R-TX).

The House failed (3/11) to secure enough votes to override a threatened presidential veto of H.R. 2082, the FY 2008 Intelligence Authorization Act (passed by the House on 12/13/07 by a vote of 222-199), allowing the measure to drop. The text of the act included a clause stating that no more than 30% of the funds authorized could be expended until all members of Congress were briefed on the intelligence behind Israel's 9/6/07 strike on the Syrian installation claimed by Israel as part of a nuclear arms program developed with North Korea. Bush alluded to this clause as one of his reasons for opposing the measure in a 3/8 letter to the House, stating that the act would "require the executive branch to submit information to the Congress that . . . could impair foreign relations."

On 3/5, Reps. Dave Weldon (R-FL) and Eliot Engel (D-NY), co-chairs of the Israel Allies Caucus (IAC) met with visiting Israeli Knesset members to discuss forming a U.S.-Israel joint study group on Palestinian rocket fire on Israel that would draft policy recommendations for the administration that will succeed Bush. Weldon and Engle formed the IAC, a bipartisan group of lawmakers "dedicated to Israel's right to live in peace within safe and secure borders," in 7/06 at the urging of members Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, an official Israeli parliamentary body, in response to the summer 2006 Lebanon war. IAC's mandate is to build "a direct line of communication, cooperation, and coordination between the United States Congress and the Knesset of Israel" and to "foster support for Israel by informing, educating and activating members [of

Congress] to be engaged in legislation and issues related to Israel's wellbeing."

To mark Israel's 60th anniversary, Reps. Hastings (D-FL), Reynolds (R-NY), Waxman (D-CA), Cantor (R-VA), Green (D-TX), Davis (R-VA), and Sanchez (D-CA), encouraged by AIPAC, arranged that a special time be set aside each week in the House from 4/3 to 5/18 for members to make statements for the record celebrating the creation of Israel. In a "dear colleague" letter circulated on 3/31, the reps. urged fellow members to "share their personal stories describing why they support Israel and a strong U.S.-Israel relationship while highlighting some of these positive contributions of our close ally." Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) was the only member to use his time to make a statement (4/22) critical of Israeli policy, not only congratulating Israel, but stressing the need for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, implementation of UN Res. 194 regarding the refugee right of return and compensation, and an end to institutionalized discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Also of note: After 4 years of research, State Dept. special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism Gregg Rickman sent (3/13) to Congress a report, "Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism," that officially adopts Israel's position that, to cite the report, "new forms of anti-Semitism have evolved," the distinguishing feature of which "is criticism of Zionism or Israeli policy that—whether intentionally or unintentionally—has the effect of promoting prejudice against all Jews by demonizing Israel and Israelis and attributing Israel's perceived faults to its Jewish character" (see Doc. D3). The report identifies Iran, Syria, and Venezuela in particular as engaging in this new anti-Semitism.

#### *Legal Actions*

Responding to an inquiry by a federal judge in 12/07 (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147), the Bush admin. said that it would not make a "statement of interest" in a case in which a jury ordered the PA to pay \$174 m. to American victims of Palestinian terrorist attacks, finding the PA culpable for failing to halt attacks by militant groups. The government legally could have requested that the ruling be set aside on the grounds that it inhibits the president's ability to conduct foreign policy with the PA. Instead, the administration opted to make a statement supporting compensation for victims of terror but expressing hope that a settlement

could be reached that would be "mutually beneficial" to all parties, leaving the final decision to the judge.

This quarter, federal judge Gordon Kromberg subpoenaed (3/3) jailed former Florida professor Sami Al-Arian, a Palestinian activist, to testify before a grand jury, threatening to delay his scheduled release and deportation (set for 4/08) for a 3d time, prompting Al-Arian to begin (3/3) a hunger strike. Al-Arian was arrested on 2/20/03 on 51 counts of aiding a designated terrorist organization (Islamic Jihad) in what was considered the Bush administration's first serious test of the Patriot Act. In 12/05, after U.S. prosecutors presented some 80 witnesses, 100,000 documents, and 425,000 recorded phone conversations, a jury acquitted him of 42 charges (including all the most serious) but deadlocked (voting 10-2 for acquittal) on 9 lesser charges that could be retried (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 139). In 5/06, a federal judge accepted a plea deal under which Al-Arian admitted to the 9 counts in exchange for being released and deported as soon as possible and verbal agreement by the government that he would not be called upon to testify in any other trial (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 140). Judge Kromberg has since tried to compel Al-Arian's testimony before 2 other grand juries, arguing that simple removal of the standard "non-cooperation" penalty in Al-Arian's plea agreement was insufficient to prevent the government from compelling his testimony, stating that specific wording precluding future testimony should have been written into the plea deal. Because Kromberg has publicly made racist statements against Muslims and said that he believes in punishing by "other means" those acquitted in court whom he thinks are guilty, Al-Arian's lawyers advised him not to comply with the 3/3 subpoena, believing Kromberg would attempt to trap Al-Arian into committing perjury, as had occurred in the case of another Muslim acquitted of terrorism charges, Sabri ben Kahla, who was then sentenced to 10 years in prison. Kromberg ordered Al-Arian moved to solitary confinement on 4/14 and delayed his deportation at least until the grand jury issue was resolved. Al-Arian ended his hunger strike on 5/2, having lost almost 40 lbs.

On 2/27, FBI and IRS agents raided the Austin, TX, home of Riad Hamad, founder of the Palestine Children's Welfare Fund (PCWF), to serve a search warrant citing probable cause to investigate him for wire fraud, bank fraud, and money laundering.

Agents confiscated some 40 boxes of papers, files, computers, and CDs, but did not formally charge or arrest Hamad. The warrant was issued by federal judge Robert Pittman, who had been in touch with Hamad in previous cases during which Hamad accused him of hostility to Palestinians and Arabs. PCWF had ties to several groups previously targeted by the Bush admin. that had been found innocent of funding Palestinian "terrorism," including the Holy Land Foundation and Middle East Children's Alliance. On 4/15, after weeks of receiving harassing phone calls and having people ring his doorbell in the middle of the night and run away, Hamad was found drowned in a pond in a local park, with duct-tape around his entire face and his hands and legs bound. The police ruled his death a suicide.

Law enforcement agents in New Jersey arrested (4/22) 84-yr.-old Ben-Ami Kadish, a retired mechanical engineer employed at the U.S. Army research arsenal, on charges of spying for Israel in the 1980s and lying to the FBI about a recent phone call with his alleged Israeli handler. Kadish immediately admitted to passing 50-100 documents to Israel between 8/79 and 7/85 regarding the U.S. nuclear program and sensitive weapons programs in exchange for "only small gifts and occasional family dinners." Kadish's handler, Yosef Yagur, had also been the handler of convicted spy for Israel Jonathan Pollard. The Israeli government's 1-sentence official response (4/23) tacitly acknowledged the spying, stating that "since 1985, Israel has stringently upheld directives from its prime ministers not to engage in any such activity in the United States."

#### *Lobbying Efforts*

Of particular note this quarter: Several prominent American Jews announced (4/24) the formation of a new pro-Israel lobby called the J Street Project to be an alternative to traditional pro-Israel U.S. lobbies, such as AIPAC, which J Street founders say often impede progress in the Middle East. The aim of the new group is to "help political candidates who support [Israel] but will occasionally question some of its policies," such as continuing settlement construction. Exec. Dir. Jeremy Ben-Ami cited (4/24) the need to challenge the claim that "to oppose any Israeli policy is to be anti-Israel." J Street supports a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and dialogue with Syria and opposes any use of force against Iran. The group, which had received \$750,000 of contributions as of

the close of the quarter, plans to endorse several congressional candidates in 6/08 and donate \$50,000 to each of their campaigns. J Street anticipated a total annual operating budget of \$1.5 m., compared to AIPAC's \$100-m. endowment, membership base of 100,000, and annual lobbying expenditure of \$1 m. J Street's principle fundraisers were New York lawyer Victor Kovner and Alan Solomont. The group cited as a prominent supporter and adviser Daniel Levy, son of Lord Levy of Britain and the Labor party's main fundraiser under Tony Blair.

J Street's first public campaign was to support (along with Churches for Middle East Peace, Israel Policy Forum, Americans for Peace Now, and the Arab-American Institute, among others) a letter sent to Bush on 5/14, urging him to use his trip to the Middle East to broker a Gaza cease-fire and end the siege on Gaza to create a positive basis for moving the peace process forward. The letter was circulated by Reps. David Price (D-NC) and Ray LaHood (R-IL) and cosigned by 52 members of the House (6 Republicans and 46 Democrats).

On 4/1, AIPAC issued an Action Alert in support of the Hasting-Reynolds initiative in the House to commemorate Israel's 60th anniversary (see "Congressional Action" above), asking its supporters to contact House reps. and urge them to make statements in support of Israel, noting that "background resources" were available for congressional offices on AIPAC's website.

The Arab-American Institute sent (3/14) a letter to Rice on behalf of 29 Arab-American organizations demanding that the State Dept. intervene with Israel to halt its ongoing discrimination against Arab Americans seeking entry to Israel and the occupied territories despite existing bilateral agreements and recent pledges to the U.S. that all American travelers will receive priority status. The groups state that evidence over the past 8 months suggests that Israeli authorities routinely deny Arab Americans, especially those of Palestinian descent, regular 3-month tourist visas, instead giving them limited entry 1-week or 2-week visas.

Under heavy pressure from Jewish groups, the United Methodist Church's General Conference dropped (ca. 5/1) discussion of 5 proposed measures to divest from Israeli companies to protest the occupation but voted (763-38) to keep divestment on the table as an option. Members also rejected (842-24) a separate motion explicitly to oppose divestment from Israel, drop

membership in the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, and prohibit members from participating on the campaign's board. Members also passed resolutions promoting Holocaust awareness, combating anti-Semitism, and opposing the proselytizing of Jews.

In response to Israel's Operation Hot Winter that left more than 120 Gazans dead, New York City Labor Against the War, an ad hoc coalition of more than 1,600 labor activists in New York and elsewhere formed as response to events of 9/11/01, launched (3/23) a petition calling for an end to U.S. military and economic support for Israel, divestment of business and labor investments in Israel, and withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces from the Middle East.

#### *Positioning for the 2008 Presidential Race*

Presidential hopeful Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) stopped (3/18–19) in Jordan and Israel as part of a regional tour with Sens. Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC). He made news in Jordan by declaring his support for Israel's claim to Jerusalem as its capital in contradiction to official U.S. policy and the declared position of previous presidents. In meetings in Israel with PM Olmert, FM Livni, DM Barak, and Likud opposition head Benjamin Netanyahu (a presumed candidate to succeed Olmert as PM), McCain stressed that his trip had intensified his concerns over Iran as a threat to the region. DM Barak gave McCain's delegation a helicopter tour of Sederot and the Gaza border and took them to meet families affected by Palestinian rocket fire. Afterward, McCain stated that he supported peace efforts but that "it's very clear that the Palestinian Authority in Gaza is committed to the extermination of the State of Israel. That's their stated goal." He added that it was "a terrible tragedy" that Israeli "children are subjected to constant terror." McCain declined to travel to the West Bank but spoke briefly with Abbas by telephone.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO) announced (4/6) that Republican and Democratic presidential hopefuls Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Barack Obama had agreed to serve as vice-chairpersons of the National Committee for Israel's 60th, overseeing Israel's 60th anniversary festivities, "to give official sponsorship to the dozens of events and ceremonies planned to take place throughout the United States in honor

of the anniversary." Serving on the planning committee is seen within the U.S. Jewish community as demonstration of support for Israel. The committee was co-chaired by former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, with every living former U.S. secretary of state, including Henry Kissinger, also on the committee.

Hamas became a pointed issue in the presidential race this quarter when Haniyeh's senior adviser Ahmed Yousef stated (4/13) in a radio interview that Hamas would prefer Obama as the next president. Days later, McCain stated (ca. 4/26) in blog exchange on the *Weekly Standard's* Web site: "I think it's very clear who Hamas wants to be the next president of the United States. . . . I think that people should understand that I will be Hamas's worst nightmare. . . . If Senator Obama is favored by Hamas I think people can make judgments accordingly." Of note: After Hamas's election victory in 2005, McCain stated on the BBC's "World News Tonight" (see *Washington Post* 5/16) that that the U.S. should deal directly with the Hamas-led government, stating: "sooner or later we are going to have to deal with them, one way or another."

Also of note: Bush's 5/15 Knesset address sparked outrage among Democrats at home, who viewed Bush's comparison of those seeking dialogue with Hamas, Hizballah, Iran, and Syria to Nazi appeasers as an attack on their political positions and those of Democratic candidate Obama in particular, who has urged greater engagement with Iran and Syria. As such, they condemned Bush for committing a grave breach of protocol by engaging in partisan politics abroad and urged McCain to distance himself. Instead McCain stated (5/15) that "the president is absolutely right," asking "Why does . . . Obama want to sit down with a state sponsor of terrorism?" Obama accused (5/15) Bush of launching "a false political attack."

#### **RUSSIA**

This quarter, Russia limited its involvement in the peace process to its Quartet participation and a brief regional tour (ca. 3/19–21) by FM Sergei Lavrov (who met with Israeli official and Palestinian officials, and, after his stop in Israel, with Hamas leader Mishal in Damascus). Russia still had hopes of hosting an international peace conference in Moscow to follow up on the Annapolis summit and press for a resumption of Syria-Israeli talks. The idea was announced immediately after Annapolis and considered for 1/08 but

was postponed indefinitely last quarter (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147). During a visit to Moscow on 4/17, Abbas asked Russia to go forward with the plans and ideally set a date for 6/08. Olmert, however, was already downplaying the possibility, stating (3/26) that “this habit” of going from one international conference to another “is not something that I am particularly in favor of.” At the close of this quarter, Russia was reportedly considering a Moscow summit for 9/08.

#### EUROPEAN UNION

The European Parliament passed by voice vote (2/20) a resolution repeating its 10/11/07 call for Israel to lift the siege on Gaza, allow the controlled reopening of Gaza’s crossings, and guarantee the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. The res. also reminded Israel and the international community that “civilian population[s] should be exempt from any military action and any collective punishment” and that Israel is required by international law to fulfill its duties as an occupying power by guaranteeing essential goods and services to Gazans.

An EU fact-finding team that visited Israel and the occupied territories 2/2–7 to investigate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the effects of Palestinian rocket fire on Sederot issued its final report on 2/21. The delegation denounced Israel’s siege of Gaza and call on the international community to intervene, with delegate MEP Richard Howitt (Britain; VP of the European Parliament’s Human Rights Sub-Committee) stating that Israel was “imposing medieval conditions on the people of Gaza” in “a clear breach of human rights” and that “European countries should take the lead to secure support from all sides in their UN Human Rights Council to seek enforcement of international humanitarian law.” Delegate MEP Gyula Hegyi (Hungary) stated that “Both sides are hostages of their own extremists. That’s why the international community should enforce a sustainable peace both on Israel and Palestine.”

The Euro-Mediterranean parliamentary assembly held its 4th plenary session in Athens on 3/27–28. In addition, 4 committees met on issues of special importance, one of which focused on strengthening peace in the Middle East. Lebanese speaker Nabih Birri did not attend this meeting, refusing to take part in a formal discussion with the Israeli rep., Dep. FM Majalli Whbee. During

the plenary session, the Syrian and Palestinian reps. walked out during Whbee’s address to protest his statements accused them of undermining the peace process. On the sidelines, Whbee met with the heads of parliament of Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, who invited him to visit their respective countries to promote bilateral relations. Whbee was also chosen to chair the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Committee on Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights, the body that drafts the assembly’s statements on the situation in the Middle East.

#### *Bilateral Contacts*

Several European delegations visited Israel this quarter to mark the 60th anniversary of the Jewish state. The most significant of these was a state visit (3/16–18) by German delegation of senior government ministers and parliamentarians across the political spectrum, led by chancellor Angela Merkel. The delegation also held high-level talks on bilateral relations, and on 3/17, Olmert and Merkel signed a bilateral accord pledging to expand the “extensive and intensive links between the Knesset . . . and the German Bundestag,” particularly by holding regular meetings of German-Israeli Parliamentary Friendship Groups and other fora allowing the 2 parliaments to “constantly exchange views on issues of mutual interest.” The states pledged to hold more frequent meetings to exchange views on foreign policy (Israel emphasized combating Iran), coordinate on military and security issues (including joint training and military staff exchanges), expand economic ties, and strengthen cultural and social relations (including through youth exchanges and domestic PR campaigns to promote bilateral ties). On 3/18, Merkel addressed a special session of the Knesset, stressing Germany’s deep commitment to defending Israel.

At the invitation of French pres. Nicholas Sarkozy, Israeli pres. Shimon Peres attended (3/10–11) “Israel-France Week” events in Paris to celebrate bilateral relations and mark Israel’s 60th anniversary. Peres met with senior French officials, industrial leaders, leaders of the Jewish community, and leading French intellectuals and members of society. The event coincided with the influential Paris Book Fair, where the State of Israel, represented by 39 Israeli authors, was the “guest of honor.” In his meeting with Peres, Sarkozy criticized (3/10) Israel’s 3/9 decision to build more settlement housing units in

Jerusalem but stressed France's unyielding defense of Israel security, stating that "As a friend, I say to you that Israel's security depends on stopping the settlements."

French FM Bernard Kouchner visited (ca. 2/16-17) Israel and Ramallah. After an initial meeting (2/16) with Abbas and Fayyad in Ramallah, Kouchner noted the Palestinian mood of "despair, frustration, and a lack of hope," attributing it to a lack of real progress in the peace process or the economic situation following the Annapolis summit and the Paris donors' conference. After meeting (2/17) with Israeli FM Livni, however, he stated that progress had been made in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and denounced all violence by Hamas.

In Britain, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith notified (early 3/08) Moshe Feiglin, head of Likud's Jewish Leadership faction (which advocates increasing military operations against Palestinians, encouraging non-Jews to emigrate, and withdrawing Israel fr. the UN), that he was banned from entering the U.K. because immigration authorities believed "that you are seeking to provoke others to serious criminal acts and fostering hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the U.K." Feiglin said the letter came as a surprise since he had no plans to travel to Britain, and in turn accused Britain of "supporting terrorism" for allowing a recent visit by Ibrahim Musawi, editor of a Hizballah journal.

#### UNITED NATIONS

The UNSC convened an emergency session on 3/1-2 to discuss Israel's Operation Hot Winter in Gaza. Under U.S. pressure, the council could agree only on a bland resolution calling on both Israel and the Palestinians "to immediately cease all acts of violence." Secy-Gen Ban Ki-moon issued (3/2) a separate presidential statement condemning Israel's use of "excessive" force. Another UNSC emergency session was held on 3/6 to discuss the Palestinian suicide attack on the Jerusalem yeshiva Mercaz Harav that day, but members failed to agree on the text of a resolution when Libya insisted on including balancing language also denouncing Israel's Operation Hot Winter and the U.S. threatened to veto. Secy-Gen Ban then issued (3/6) his own statement denouncing the Palestinian attack. Ban also issued statements condemning Israel's settlement expansion plans (3/10), its 3/12 assassinations targeting Islamic Jihad members (3/14), and Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel (3/14).

UN Undersecy. for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes visited the region (2/15-18) to meet with Israeli, PA, donor, and UN officials. He began his trip in Gaza, touring hospitals in Bayt Lahiya and Gaza City, and expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation and level of destruction under Israel's siege. On a stop in Sederot (2/17), he condemned rocket fire, saying it "has absolutely no justification and should be stopped," but added that residents of Sederot were nonetheless better off than Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel's siege "collectively penalizes" all Gazans for the unacceptable acts of a few. Meeting in Jerusalem on 2/18, Israeli FMin. Dir-Gen. Aaron Abramovich condemned Holmes for "encourag[ing] terrorists" by equating Israeli and Palestinian violence, but Holmes dismissed the comments, reiterating that the overall deterioration of living conditions in Gaza was "an affront to the dignity of the people there" and also denouncing Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank. (Holmes had requested meetings with Israeli DM Ehud Barak and FM Livni, who refused to meet him to protest his Gaza tour.) Holmes then met separately (2/18) with PA PM Fayyad and with donor and UN humanitarian reps. to discuss the strengthening of aid coordination.

At a 2/26 briefing on the situation in Gaza at the UN in New York, UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process Robert Serry stated that living conditions in Gaza had deteriorated significantly since Israel imposed its siege in 6/07, causing deep suffering, threatening Gazans' health, and jeopardizing the peace process launched at Annapolis. UN Undersecy. Holmes reported that most industrial and agricultural operations in Gaza had collapsed, 80% of the population relied on UN food aid, and rates of anemia and diarrhea among children were rising dramatically. While Holmes and Serry stated that Hamas bore its "full share of responsibility for the suffering of Gazans" for its failure to curb militant groups, they denounced Israel's response as disproportionate and illegal under international law, warning it would only promote extremism and radicalization. Israel's ambassador to the UN Dan Gillerman strongly criticized (2/26) the envoys for focusing too much on the consequences and not the causes of Gaza's trouble (i.e., Palestinian rocket fire).

Also on 2/26, the UN Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) outgoing special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied territories



John Dugard submitted his final report (made public formally in 3/08 at the UNHRC's regular session), stating that, while Palestinian violence should be deplored, it should also be understood as the "inevitable consequence" of Israeli occupation and Israeli laws that resemble South African apartheid. He also stated that until Israel's occupation ends, "peace cannot be expected, and violence will continue." Israel's amb. to the UN in Geneva, Itzhak Levanon, accused Dugard of inflaming hatred between Jews and Palestinians and of ignoring "the common link between al-Qa'ida and the Palestinian terrorists . . . that both intentionally target civilians with the mere purpose to kill."

On 3/26, the UNHRC named Richard Falk, emeritus professor of international law at Princeton, to replace Dugard as special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, and appointed another departing special rapporteur, Switzerland's Jean Ziegler, to its 18-member advisory board. Both men are considered highly critical of Israel. Falk was chosen by consensus of the 47 UNHRC member states (as was Zeigler) despite efforts by Jewish groups to have Canada and the EU publicly oppose his nomination. The EU did not comment; Canada did not take action to block Falk's nomination but issued a statement dissociating itself from his selection. The U.S., which is not a member state, made a statement to the UNHRC criticizing Falk's published writings. By 4/10, Olmert's government formally requested that Falk not be sent to Israel, hinting that he might be denied entry if he arrived, claiming Falk could not be fair because of his prior condemnation of Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians. On 4/23, the American National Lawyers Guild issued an open letter calling on Israel to permit Falk unrestricted travel to Israel and the occupied territories.

UN Asst. Secy.-Gen. Angela Kane briefed (4/24) the UNSC on the situation in the Middle East, noting in particular the deteriorating situation in Gaza and Israel's increasing violations of Lebanese air space. The session ended soon after Kane's address, when Western reps. walked out in protest over a statement by Libyan amb. Giadalla Ettalhi likening conditions in Gaza to a Nazi death camp.

At the close of a 2-day session in Geneva, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) announced (2/29) the creation of a new permanent team of specialists for the establishment of public-private partnerships to promote joint projects among the UNECE's

56 member states and more than 70 affiliated NGOs and international professional organizations worldwide. The coordinating group was first proposed to the UNECE by Israel in 6/07, and the UNECE named Israel the team's permanent chair.

Also of note: South Africa withdrew (5/1) its bid to host the UN's 2d World Conference Against Racism (last held in Durban in 9/01) amid lobbying against and threats to boycott the conference last quarter (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147). The conference was expected to be held in a European capital in spring 2009.

#### IRAN

As the quarter opened, the international community was conducting a 2-pronged effort to persuade Iran to halt enrichment of uranium at its nuclear facilities: The EU was leading a diplomatic initiative, hoping to renew direct talks with Iran to obtain an agreement through dialogue, while the 5 permanent members of the UNSC and Germany (the P5+1), led by the U.S., were drafting a new UN res. threatening increased economic and political sanctions against Iran unless it suspended its nuclear program. The P5+1 reportedly hoped, prior to Iran's 3/14 parliamentary elections, to secure unanimous UNSC approval of a new sanctions package as well as agreement on an EU incentives package offering renewed talks 6-8 weeks after the elections, hoping that the carrot-and-stick measures would encourage support for Iranian pres. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's opponents in the elections and appear to reward them after their presumed election wins. (Ultimately conservatives maintained a parliamentary majority in the 3/24 elections because many reformists were barred from running, though the conservative block critical of Ahmadinejad gained slightly.) The U.S. hoped that, ideally, an agreement on halting Iran's nuclear program could be reached before the end of Bush's term. Assessments released last quarter by U.S. intelligence agencies (concluding that Iran had halted its military nuclear program in 2003) and the U.S. General Accounting Office (concluding that 20 years of sanctions had not affected Iran) seemed largely forgotten (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147).

In keeping with this 2-pronged strategy, Britain and France submitted a draft res. on new sanctions to the UNSC on 2/21 for debate. On 2/25, the P5+1 opened discussions on reviving a 2006 incentives package

offering Iran economic, technological, and security benefits (including a rollback of UN and bilateral sanctions, Western support for Iran's participation in the WTO, spare parts for commercial aircraft, and assistance in developing a civilian nuclear energy program under IAEA supervision) in exchange for halting domestic uranium enrichment. The U.S. cautioned (2/25), however, that it was not willing to be party to any deal that provided Iran security guarantees and did not want the package to give Iran the impression that its delays would be rewarded.

Meanwhile, UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Mohamed ElBaradei announced (2/22) completion of his regular report on Iranian nuclear safeguards (not released publicly; submitted to the IAEA board on 3/3), highlighting that Iran had begun using 10 "new-generation centrifuges" capable of producing fuel for a nuclear reactor or fissile material for a weapon, but that 10 such centrifuges were too few to enrich enough uranium to operate either a weapons or an industrial-scale energy program. ElBaradei stated that Iran had been cooperative in answering questions about Iran's past programs but still refused to halt uranium enrichment, citing its right to develop a nuclear energy program.

On 3/3, the UNSC passed (14-0, Indonesia abstaining) Res. 1803, encouraging but not requiring nations to impose a number of new sanctions on top of those agreed in Res. 1727 (12/23/06) and Res. 1747 (3/26/07) to pressure Iran to halt its nuclear program. The recommended new restrictions included travel bans on 5 individuals involved in Iran's nuclear efforts, travel and financial restrictions on another 24 individuals, an expanded list of banned dual-use items of potential use to the nuclear program, international "vigilance" about approving new export credits and financial transactions with Iran's 2 largest banks, and inspections of cargo to and from Iran if there are "reasonable grounds" to suspect they contain sanctioned items. The res. also threatened to impose more sanctions on Iran if it did not halt all nuclear activities within 90 days. Separately, the U.S. Treasury Dept. issued its own call on 3/20, urging world financial organizations to stop doing business with Iran to make it harder for it to engage in global commerce. On 5/2, the P5+1 formally offered a slightly expanded version of the 2006 incentives offer.

The carrots and sticks had no noticeable impact. On 4/8, after the new UNSC res.

was passed, Iran began (4/8) installation of 6,000 new centrifuges to enrich uranium at its Natanz facility. On 5/4, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei responded to the incentives offer by stating "we will forcefully continue on our path."

#### OTHER

At the opening of the Israeli government's 3d annual 2-day Global Forum for Combating Anti-Semitism, held (2/24-25) in Jerusalem and attended by government officials from 45 countries, Canadian MP Irwin Cotler and British MP John Mann announced the formation of the **International Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism (ICCA)**, described both as a coalition of governments, scholars, and NGOs for that purpose and as a "scholarly organization intended to advance the study of the oldest hatred." The ICCA was the brainchild of the Israeli FMin. and brought into being in coordination with pro-Israel groups in North America. The ICCA's aim is to act as a global coordinating mechanism that will organize the many existing anti-Semitism initiatives by organizations and governments into a "critical mass of advocacy" on the issue worldwide. Organizers said their first task would be to set up a steering committee of parliamentarians, scholars, and NGO heads to mobilize task forces to address specific issues, such as "anti-Semitism in the Muslim and Arab worlds, the parallels between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, boycotts that single out Israel, anti-Semitism at the UN, and best practices—such as legislation or activism initiatives—that can be copied from one country to others." Also at the conference, Charles Small, director of the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Anti-Semitism, announced the formation of the **International Association for the Study of Anti-Semitism (IASA)**, "a scholarly association meant to unite and help scholars and institutions that study anti-Semitism." IASA, a joint project of the 4 existing academic institutes focused on anti-Semitism (Hebrew University, Technical University of Berlin, Tel Aviv University, Yale), planned to sponsor scholarly research, conferences, and publications on anti-Semitism.

The **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** approved Israel's membership in its Development Center, a semi-independent arm of the OECD that fosters economic growth and improvement in living conditions in developing countries. The Development Center includes 23 OECD member states and

9 nonmember states. The OECD, an international economic grouping made up mainly of developed industrial nations that embrace "free market principles and democracy" that provides a forum for member governments to compare policy, identify good practices, and coordinate domestic and international policies, began the process of considering Israel for full membership in 5/07.

## DONORS

The donors' Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) met in London on 5/2, with a side meeting of the Quartet, to follow up on the progress of funding and implementation of the PA's 2008-10 Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) since the AHLC's pledging conference in Paris in 12/07 (see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147). Prior to the meeting, the IMF issued (4/25) a quarterly report on the PRDP, noting that the PA had made significant progress on reducing its budget deficit, but that if Israel did not ease restrictions on Palestinian movement as pledged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and at 11/07 in Annapolis, the Palestinian economy would likely continue to contract in 2008. The report highlighted that while donors pledged \$7.7 b. at the 12/07 Paris donors conference, much of the money was earmarked for humanitarian and development projects that were not part of the PRDP's plan. Donations allocated to recurrent budget expenses fell \$400 m. short of what was needed for FY 2008. Moreover, less than half of the \$1.5 b. pledged for budget support had been received (\$502 m. by the U.S. and Europe, and \$215 m. by Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE; much of this money was funneled through the EU's new mechanism, PEGASE, which became fully operational this quarter; see Quarterly Update in *JPS* 147 for background). The World Bank reported (4/30) that Gaza's economy had not grown at all in 2007 and that poverty had climbed to 67% as a result of the siege, which had "considerably eroded whatever private sector backbone remained in the economy and in a manner that is progressively more difficult to reverse." Though the AHLC meeting did

not explicitly solicit new pledges, Rice, arriving in London on 5/1, publicly upbraided Arab states (which have been reluctant to fund the PA if negotiations with Israel are not progressing) for trying to give as little aid as possible to the Palestinians, stating that it was too early to "despair" about Israel and the PA missing an end-of-year target date for reaching an agreement on final status.

Separately, the World Bank approved (4/22) \$55 m. to replenish its Trust Fund for Gaza and the West Bank, as well as disbursement of \$37 m. from the trust fund to finance emergency sewage projects (\$12 m.), the PA's social safety net (\$10 m.), neighborhood development projects (\$10 m.), and emergency water projects (\$5 m.)

Other donor meetings this quarter included the regular monthly meetings of the Local Development Forum (3/6, 4/24, and 5/13) to touch base on the PA's reform and development priorities and budget issues. In addition, 3 of the 4 main donor "strategy groups" (SGs) that coordinate policy with the PA met this quarter: economic policy on 2/27; the social development and humanitarian assistance on 3/27; and the governance and reform on 3/18 and 5/14. (The infrastructure SG did not meet.) Various sector working groups (SWGs) and task forces that operate under the SGs to address specific issues also held regular follow-up meetings. Under the economic SG these included the fiscal SWG (4/18), fiscal task force (3/6, 3/13), and private sector development and trade SWG (3/3, 5/13). Under the governance SG these included SWGs on election reform (3/21), judicial reform (3/17, 5/13), and public administration and civil service sector reform (5/12). Under the social and humanitarian assistance SG, these included SWGs on health (2/20, 5/13), education (3/26, 5/13), and "social protection" (which addresses the Social Safety Net Reform Project funded through PEGASE; 4/1). The Local Consultative Group met in Ramallah on 5/7 to prepare for the upcoming "Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and Rule of Law," to be held in 6/08. No details of these meetings were publicly released.